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The Literary Unconscious: Ideology and Utopia
in the Nineteenth-Century Realist Novel in England and Russia

The Literary Unconscious: Ideology and Utopia
in the Nineteenth-Century Realist Novel in England and Russia

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies

by

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Abstract

In this volume, I have examined a number of works of nineteenth-century realist fiction from England and Russia, using the double interpretive method recommended by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*. In particular, I have employed the dialectical double hermeneutic suggested by Jameson, who argues that the most productive approach to literary texts is to consider them from the double perspective of ideology and utopia. That is, critics should approach literary texts by seeking out the ideological roots that lie beneath the textual surface and from which the texts grow, while at the same time keeping a careful eye out for the (often well hidden) utopian longings and visions that also inform all works of literature.

Among the English works of fiction I examine, I find that the obvious (liberal) utopian leanings of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) are severely limited by the bourgeois ideology that pervades both texts. Similarly, the (conservative) utopian projects of Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" (1842) and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) are limited by the presence of bourgeois ideology in the texts. Thus, in bourgeois-dominated England, bourgeois ideology exerts a conservative force, while in still-feudal Russia bourgeois ideology is a progressive, even radical force that works against the prevailing ideology of the society. I also discuss Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), both of which seem pessimistic, but which in fact contain strong utopian energies when read through the optic of Marxist historicism, supplemented by the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre is also useful as a supplement to Marxist analysis in my readings of the utopian energies in Dostoevsky's short novel *Notes from Underground* (1864) and of Leo Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886). Together these readings demonstrate the flexibility of Jameson's double hermeneutic by

showing that it can be applied to texts in which the fundamental forces of ideology and utopia operate in a variety of different ways, due to differences not only in the texts, but in the historical contexts of the texts being read.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of those who have contributed to my education over the years, including my parents, Ahmad Daraiseh and Fathieh Zo'ubi, and my brothers and sisters, especially Banan Daraiseh, who helped me get acclimated to the University of Arkansas. I would also like to thank all of the professors who have taught me over the years at Arkansas, including my dissertation committee members. I would especially like to thank my director, M. Keith Booker, for doing so much to provide me with the theoretical resources that made this project possible.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Professor M. Keith Booker.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Realism, Or, The Cultural Logic Of Early Capitalism

In *The Communist Manifesto*, written to provide a coherent statement of principles for the working-class revolutions that were sweeping Europe in 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels perform perhaps history's best-known feat of dialectical analysis. On the one hand, they outline the evils and abuses of capitalism and of the bourgeois class that it brought to power in Europe. On the other hand, they express admiration, even awe, at the accomplishments of those same bourgeoisie, boldly charging about the globe shattering traditional societies and paving the way for socialism. In short, they admire the utopian energies of capitalism, which had recently demonstrated that the world can, indeed, be changed, but worry about the ideological limitations that prevented the bourgeoisie from taking their revolution any farther.

Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981), arguably the most influential book of literary theory to have been published in the past thirty-five years, performs something of the same dialectical task for literary critics. The book is important first and foremost because of its compelling argument in favor of politically-oriented, historically-situated readings of literary texts, and its opening imperative ("Always historicize!") has become something of a mantra for legions of literary critics who came after it. *The Political Unconscious* also includes a spirited insistence that these historico-political readings should be specifically *Marxist* (and dialectical) ones, even if many critics influenced by the book have obeyed its fundamental historicist dictum, while ignoring the Marxist underpinnings of Jameson's basic argument. In addition, *The Political Unconscious* can be considered the first major declaration of Jameson's devotion to utopian thought as a crucial part of his critical project, including a closing bit of advice that

forms the heart of my own project in this dissertation. In keeping with his general practice of approaching critical questions in a dialectical manner, Jameson charges all who would follow his advice and undertake Marxist readings of literature to do so in a double hermeneutic mode, so that a

Marxist negative hermeneutic, a Marxist practice of ideological analysis proper, must in the practical work of reading and interpretation be exercised *simultaneously* with a Marxist positive hermeneutic, or a decipherment of the Utopian impulses of these same still ideological cultural texts. (296, emphasis in original)

Taking Jameson's suggestion to heart, I attempt in the following pages to apply this double hermeneutic to some of the key texts of nineteenth-century realist fiction from both England and Russia. In so doing, I extend Jameson's dialectical critical style to include not only the dialectically-opposed critical concepts of ideology and utopia, but also to include the national cultures that occupy the two opposed poles of historical development in the history of nineteenth-century Europe. The central narrative of this history is the story of capitalist modernization, a story that lies at the heart of *The Communist Manifesto* and that had reached its farthest extent in highly industrialized England, where Marx and Engels composed that document. Among the major European powers, though, capitalist modernization was lagging at its most undeveloped stage in distant Russia, where a determined effort (and the mighty Russian winter) had recently turned away Napoleon's armies and where the powers that be were still stubbornly seeking to turn away other modernizing forces as well.

One of these forces was realist fiction, which Marxist literary historians have generally acknowledged to be a key tool through which the emergent bourgeoisie expressed their ideology and presented it, carefully packaged and disguised, to the world. The story of modern realism, then, and the story of capitalist modernization are largely one and the same. By looking at texts

from both England and Russia, at texts from a range of times over the century, and at texts written in a variety of forms and styles, I hope to be able to examine the ideological underpinnings and the utopian energies of realism from a variety of different perspectives, gaining a greater, historically situated, understanding of the texts involved, but also of the phenomenon of realism and of the historical forces that drove it in the nineteenth century.

Per Jameson's basic theoretical premise, all literary texts are informed by a "political unconscious," a term that Jameson derives from Freud in a purely metaphorical way—with no implication of an endorsement of the specifics of Freud's model of the human psyche. Indeed, Jameson does not even insist that the political unconscious is literally unconscious: he simply assumes that all literary texts are driven by ideological impulses that can typically be determined only by in-depth analysis, employing a method of depth epistemology that is metaphorically similar to Freud's technique of digging beneath the surface to uncover the unconscious motivations of his patients. This method of reading works particularly well with Jameson's characteristically allegorical mode of interpretation, allowing him to uncover different levels of meaning as he performs his vertical hermeneutic task.

Similarly, for Jameson, *all* literary texts (and all cultural phenomena in general), no matter how nasty and debased, contain utopian energies that can be revealed through a similar method of interpretive excavation. This is not to say, of course, that some texts are not more clearly ideological than others, or that some texts are not more utopian than others, or that one side of Jameson's double hermeneutic is not easier than the other to execute on some (indeed *most*) texts. In this dissertation, in fact, I operate largely on the assumption that the more difficult hermeneutic operations are typically the more interesting ones. I have chosen the texts on which I focus with this premise in mind. I begin, for example, with a discussion in Chapter Two of

Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), both of which have obvious utopian inclinations in their visions of a better life for the poor, but both of which are informed by bourgeois ideologies that seriously limit their imaginative range.

In Chapter Three I turn to Russian texts, focusing on Nikolai Gogol's long story "The Overcoat" (1842) and Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866), both of which are driven by nostalgic utopian visions of a traditional Russia free of Western contamination. I find, however, that both texts are strongly informed by the presence of bourgeois ideology, a presence that largely defeats the efforts of the authors to oppose Westernization. In the context of nineteenth-century Russia, however, the presence of bourgeois ideology in these texts makes them more progressive, as opposed to the English texts of Dickens and Gaskell, which are made more conservative by the same ideological force.

Jameson's suggestion of a double hermeneutic based on ideology and utopia is especially valuable because the ideological underpinnings of literary texts often function in dialectical opposition to their utopian leanings, a notion that Paul Ricoeur has particularly emphasized.¹ As Phillip Wegner puts it, summarizing Ricoeur's work, utopia serves as "a progressive counterblast to the essential conservatism of ideology" (18). However, this particular counterbalance only operates if one is speaking of the *dominant* ideology in a given society. My work here generalizes the insight of Ricoeur because, in the Russian case, it is actually the presence of bourgeois ideology that is progressive and the utopian leanings of the texts of Gogol and Dostoevsky that are conservative, even regressive.

In Chapter Four, I shift my focus to an elaboration of utopian energies, choosing two texts by Thomas Hardy—*The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895)—largely because these texts are widely known for their darkness and pessimism. Reading these

texts through the optic of the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, combined with more conventional Marxist historicism, I find that these texts do indeed contain significant utopian energies. In Chapter Five, I employ similar modes of analysis to explore the utopian dimensions of Dostoevsky's short novel *Notes from Underground* (1864) and of Leo Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886), two texts that, again, do not seem obvious candidates on which to focus in this way.²

All of these readings are, of course, performed with an eye to the historical contexts in which the novels or stories were written and in which their action takes place. This context, in various ways, consists primarily of the story of capitalist modernization, a story that has been told many times in many ways. It takes its classic form in England, where historians such as Edward Gibbon began, in the late eighteenth century, to develop scientific modes of historiography that gave a logical shape to the long historical process (later referred to by Jameson as the "bourgeois cultural revolution") by which a once despised and downtrodden group of merchants and mountebanks rose, through industry and ruthlessness, to become Europe's new ruling bourgeois class, the most dynamic and powerful class in world history. Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was published in six volumes between 1776 and 1789 and thus exactly spanned the period from the American Declaration of Independence to the beginning of the French Revolution, both key historical markers along the road that would eventually lead to global capitalist supremacy. Gibbon's narrative outlines a golden period of classical civilization (highlighted by the Greeks and Romans), followed by a decline into the Catholic/aristocratic-dominated "Dark Ages," ruled by ignorance and superstition, creating a period in which freedom was repressed and cultural production was virtually nil. Via this model, the rise of the bourgeoisie was a rebirth for culture and

civilization—thus the term “Renaissance,” which became popular in the nineteenth century to describe this phenomenon. This rebirth was also a presumed return to intellectual achievement that saw the rise of modern science and the rule of rationality in the Enlightenment, followed by the practical developments of the Industrial Revolution.

This process, again, took its classic form in England, including such key events as the shattering of Catholic power by Henry VIII in the 1530s and the beginning of the end of traditional royal power in the events that culminated in the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688. The Industrial Revolution was particularly well defined in England, where coal-fired steam power enabled the development of an extensive system of factories and drove the railway system that made it possible for those factories to receive raw materials and send finished goods out into the market. By 1848, when Marx and Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* to provide a coherent statement of the rationale for the working-class revolutions then sweeping Europe, there was no such revolution in England, where bourgeois power was more firmly established than anywhere else. And, of course, it is no accident that the world-changing analysis of capitalism and its history performed by Marx (with support from Engels) was carried out in England, using the English situation as its exemplary case.

There was similarly no revolution in Russia in 1848, but for the opposite reason that history had not yet proceeded to the point where the conditions of possibility (including, most importantly, the presence of a well-developed proletariat) for such revolutions had developed. In Russia, the tsars maintained a grip on political power far greater than that of England’s Queen Victoria, even though the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 also indicated the way in which the Russian situation was far less stable than the one in England. The Russian aristocracy as a whole maintained far more political power than the English one throughout the nineteenth

century, partly because the Russian economy remained primarily agrarian even up to the time of the revolution of 1917, meaning that most economic power remained in the hands of landholders, who were primarily aristocrats. Until 1861 (when the Russian serfs were officially freed at about the same time as the slaves in the American South), the Russian economic system remained literally feudal. Meanwhile, in the absence of extensive economic opportunities elsewhere, most Russian peasants had little choice but to remain on the land, so that the economy of Russia was essentially feudal up to 1917, with most political power in the hands of the tsar, most economic power in the hands of the aristocracy as a whole, and most intellectual power in the hands of the Russian Orthodox Church.

At the same time, Russia could not remain entirely isolated from the rest of Europe, no matter how much many Russians wanted to do so. Many Russian intellectuals traveled extensively in Western Europe and could not help but be affected by the cultural and economic climate there. Meanwhile, Russian culture was extensively influenced by Western European culture (most importantly by French culture, but to a great extent by English culture as well). Western European culture was itself, by the nineteenth century, in somewhat of a period of consolidation, having been transformed (along with all other aspects of Western European society) by the bourgeois cultural revolution. In particular, the rise of the novel as a dominant genre and of realism as a dominant literary mode provided the emergent bourgeoisie with a perfect venue for the expression of their view of the world as a rational place ruled by scientific principles, a place in which industrious individuals could master those principles and thus come to dominate the world around them.

Given the force with which realist fiction rushed upon the historical stage in Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it should come as no surprise that such fiction

came to be an important force in Russia as well, where authors such as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy produced their own distinctive forms of realist fiction and took their place among the world's most distinguished writers of that fiction. Realist fiction gave such writers a powerful tool for the exploration of the complex political, social, economic, and cultural situation of Russia, and writers such as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy did a great deal to bend that fiction to their needs. They could, however, bend it only so far, and part of my argument in this dissertation hinges on the notion that realist fiction, forged in the historical fires of Western Europe's bourgeois cultural revolution, carries with it powerful resonances of the ideology that fueled that revolution.

The bourgeois inclinations of the realist novel—and of realist fiction as a whole—have long been recognized. The classic exposition of this view (though he does not actually employ the term “bourgeois,” preferring “middle class”) is Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, first published in 1957. Focusing on Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson as the founding figures of the novel, Watt's basic premise is that the novel rose to prominence because of the particular historical conditions that obtained in eighteenth-century England. He thus states the goal of his book:

Assuming that the appearance of our first three novelists within a single generation was probably not sheer accident, and that their geniuses could not have created the new form unless the conditions of the time had also been favourable, it attempts to discover what these favourable conditions in the literary and social situation were. (9)

Watt in particular regards realism as the defining mode of the novel, arguing that "modern realism, of course, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses" (12). That is, realism is a literary expression of the epistemological assumptions of the Enlightenment rise of science. However, he regards the novel as growing out of the medieval romance, but as developing its own distinctive characteristics that

have to do with this scientific worldview, as well as with the fact that the novel was the first genre to be specifically designed as a commodity, its characteristics as a genre driven in large part by market forces and by the interaction among writers, publishers, and the new middle-class reading public. These characteristics include standard aspects such as plot, setting, and characterization, all of which help the text to create a world that appears to resemble the real world. Key characteristics also include such aspects as style and length, novels beginning in the eighteenth century tending to involve long prose narratives written in a relatively straightforward, accessible, journalistic style, because those were the kinds of narratives that publishers deemed most marketable and most profitable. In general, Watt argues that the emergent novel takes its great vitality directly from the impressive energies of the emergent middle class that provided both its authors and most of its readers:

Ultimately, however, the supersession of patronage by the booksellers, and the consequent independence of Defoe and Richardson from the literary past, are merely reflections of a larger and even more important feature of the life of their time—the great power and self-confidence of the middle class as a whole” (59).

Watt’s emphasis on the role of the new printing and publishing industry in the development of the modern novel echoes Walter Benjamin's suggestion (in his seminal essay “The Storyteller”) that storytelling is becoming a lost art and that the demise of storytelling begins with the invention of the printing press and occurs as part of the shift from oral to print culture (and from stories to novels) that has characterized Western society for the past four centuries:

The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. What distinguishes the novel from the story (and from the epic in the narrower sense) is its essential dependence on the book. The dissemination of the novel became possible only with the invention of printing. (*Illuminations* 87)

Benjamin particularly emphasizes the contribution that the rise of the novel makes to the decline in the ability of individuals to relate to others: in contrast to the communal activity of telling (and listening to) stories, both the reading and the writing of novels are solitary activities performed by lone readers and writers in isolation from others. In short, they are activities that are quite consonant with the individualist emphasis of bourgeois ideology:

The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual. (87)³

Watt identifies Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) as the first true realist novel and moves forward from there.⁴ However, partly because of the crucial influence of Mikhail Bakhtin, much of the more recent work on the history of the novel has been concerned with extending the origins of the novel backward in time before the eighteenth century. For example, Margaret Doody's *The True Story of the Novel* (1996) draws upon Bakhtin, among other sources, to trace the origins of the novel to ancient literary sources, including such early texts as the *Satyricon* of Petronius and *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius. In any case, Doody locates the origin of the novel in ancient Greece, but argues that it was spurred by contact with a variety of different cultural influences from European, Asian, and African sources. Doody thus challenges the claim of the European (especially British) bourgeoisie to have invented the novel, arguing instead for prebourgeois and nonWestern sources.

Historians of the novel such as Lennard Davis and Paul Hunter have located the origins of the novel before the eighteenth century as well, focusing particularly on journalism and other genres that influenced the eventual development of the modern realist novel. Jane Spencer, meanwhile, has retold the story of the birth of the novel from the perspective of the women

novelists who were so important to that story but have conventionally been underappreciated by literary historians.⁵

None of these extensions of Watt's analysis, however, disputes the notion that the modern realist novel is fundamentally bourgeois in character. Indeed, perhaps the most useful update of Watt's work is Michael McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (1987), in which actually strengthens that notion. McKeon extends and enriches Watt's discussion by paying more attention to early versions of the novel itself before the eighteenth century and to the persistence of prior forms in the eighteenth century. Importantly, McKeon emphasizes in good dialectical fashion that the realist novel serves not merely as a venue for the expression of bourgeois ideology, but in fact plays a crucial constitutive role in the historical development of that ideology. In addition, McKeon pays attention to aspects of the novel (and bourgeois society) that go beyond the work of Watt in the way that McKeon sees the novel as an important venue in which various crises and conflicts in the emergent bourgeois society of the eighteenth century could be explored and potentially resolved. In this sense, he anticipates Dennis Walder's characterization of the realist novel as "a mimesis of reality depicting struggles of the society it is representing and the limitations and conflicts found within this society" (Walder 21). Of course, the characterizations by McKeon and Walder that the novel is a place of conflict and struggle provides simply another example of the way in which the novel is informed by bourgeois ideology, with its central emphasis on competition. And both McKeon and Walder follow Bakhtin's agonistic vision of the novel as a sort of linguistic battleground in which various wordviews (or ideologies), as represented by different characteristic styles of language use, can confront one another and struggle for supremacy—without, however, the requirement that any one of them win a final victory.

McKeon builds on Bakhtin's work in other ways as well, granting that the novel has ancient roots; however, he argues that the genre is transformed in the capitalist era. Indeed, he sees the modern realist novel as a distinctively new form that arises out of the distinctively new social world of modern capitalism. For McKeon, the novel

attains its modern, "institutional" stability and coherence in the eighteenth century because of its unrivaled power both to formulate, and to explain, a set of problems that are central to early modern experience. These may be understood as problems of categorical instability, which the novel, originating to resolve, also inevitably reflects. (20)

Importantly, McKeon concludes that "in the formation of novelistic narrative, the most important narrative model was not another 'literary' genre at all, but historical experience itself," indicating the way in which novelistic plots were modeled on the new sense of cause-and-effect narrative that drove bourgeois models of scientific historiography (238).

What characterizes all of these stories of the rise of the realist novel, however, is their focus on the *English* novel, which they regard (not surprisingly, given England's place on the forefront of the bourgeois cultural revolution) as the leading edge in the development of the new genre. By the nineteenth century, however, any comprehensive study of the novel as a genre or of realism as a mode must move beyond England. The French realist novel was particularly rich during the century (reflecting, among other things, the complex and tumultuous history of nineteenth-century France).⁶ It is typical of literary histories, especially those written with a Marxist bent, to regard Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert as representing the pinnacle of realist fiction, and these two figures will necessarily make an appearance at several points during this dissertation. Still, however different the histories (both literary and political) of France and England might have been in the nineteenth century, it is Russia, not France, that occupies the opposite extreme in the historical development of the bourgeois cultural revolution, which was

so firmly established in England but was still so tenuously gasping for air in Russia. It is, in a sense, that revolution which is the true topic of this dissertation, but a focus on realism and the novel provides special insights into that revolution. As Jameson has noted, “The novel plays a significant role in what can be called a properly bourgeois cultural revolution—that immense process of transformation whereby populations whose life habits were formed by other, now archaic, modes of production are effectively reprogrammed for life and work in the new world of market capitalism” (*Political* 138).

Given that the bourgeois cultural revolution took a very different form in Russia from that in England, the story of the rise of realism in Russia was a very different one. If the realist novel came to the fore in English culture in the eighteenth century because it was so much in tune with the desires and attitudes of England’s new ruling class, realism in Russia came kicking and screaming into a nineteenth-century world where it was far from entirely welcomed by the prevailing powers. Still, the nineteenth century became known as a literary golden age in Russia, as an emergent realist literature broke new ground in a culture previously dominated by traditional religious-oriented forms. This rise of Russian realism was highly political, championed by progressive critics such as Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848), who called upon novelists to support democracy and tackle the plight of the lower class and the social problems of the time, such as serfdom, bureaucracy, absolutism, and a lingering feudalism that prevented Russia from experiencing the kind of economic growth that was being seen in Western Europe, especially in England. Ironically, some of the leading practitioners of this new Russian realism, such as Gogol and Dostoevsky, wrote with intentions that were diametrically opposed to those of Belinsky (though Dostoevsky had been a supporter of Belinsky in the early, left-leaning stages of his career). Nevertheless, the realist texts of Gogol and Dostoevsky reflected (however

inadvertently) the growing purchase of bourgeois ideas in Russia, ideas that, I will argue, were partly conveyed by the realist mode itself.

This might be the place to acknowledge the fact that my analyses of English fiction in Chapters Two and Four focus on works that are clearly novels in the traditional sense, while my analyses of Russian fiction in Chapters Three and Five focus on a wider variety of works, including a story by Gogol, a conventional novel by Dostoevsky, a brief novel by Dostoevsky that might better be considered Menippean satire, and a novella by Tolstoy. My choice of texts was made not because there are not enough Russian novels from which to choose (Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina* might have been obvious choices, for example, and would have worked quite well within my analytical framework), but because I believe this greater variety of fictions is more representative of the complex and unsteady situation of realism (and of bourgeois ideology) within the context of nineteenth-century Russia. The mature bourgeois society of nineteenth-century England is best represented by conventional novels, while the unruly hybrid society of nineteenth-century Russia is best represented by a variety of fictional forms.⁷

In any case, I am not so much interested in specific individual texts as I am in the phenomenon of literary realism, in the different ways that realism played out in England and Russia, and in what the ideological inclinations and utopian energies of realist texts can tell us about these two very different historical contexts. Because of my broad interest in realist fiction (in the context of nineteenth-century history), this dissertation might be considered a work of genre criticism more than an attempt to provide "readings" of specific individual texts. Here I again follow Jameson, for whom genres in general carry strong markers of their ideological origins, though Jameson feels that the novel is a special genre in this sense due to its ability to

evolve over time, changing the ideological messages that it carries as a genre. Indeed, he argues that the novel is “the end of genre” in the sense he otherwise discusses as “a narrative ideologeme whose outer form, secreted like a shell or exoskeleton, continues to emit its ideological message long after the extinction of its host.” Instead, the novel,

as it explores its mature and original possibilities in the nineteenth century, is not an outer, conventional form of that kind. Rather, such forms, and their remains ... are the raw material on which the novel works, transforming their ‘telling’ into its ‘showing.’ (*Political* 151)

The realist novel, Jameson goes on, “has as its historic function the systematic undermining and demystification, the secular “decoding,” of those preexisting inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial givens” (152).

This vision of the novel as an ever-changing, ever-evolving genre that respects no set rules and devours all other genres in its wake is, of course, quite similar to the description of the novel by Bakhtin, whose theory of genre as a carrier of ideological material is also very much like Jameson’s. The crucial difference is that Jameson appears to accept the widely held view that the novel as a genre arose with the European bourgeoisie as one of the key means by which they expressed their ideology and justified their new power to themselves and to the world. For Bakhtin, however, the modern bourgeois novel is simply a particular (and particularly important) instance of a genre with much more ancient roots in folk cultures that go back at least to the time of the ancient Greeks. One might say that his vision of the novel as an ever-evolving genre with no fixed characteristics and an ability simultaneously to represent multiple ideologies means that the novel as a whole transcends bourgeois ideology, while Jameson’s vision of the novel as “a process rather than a form” that has these same subversive, plural, and malleable characteristics (*Political* 151) derives from an understanding that bourgeois ideology itself has exactly these same properties.

My own view is close to McKeon's, which itself is something of a dialectical combination of the attitudes of Jameson and of Bakhtin concerning the history of the novel; I am willing to grant that the novel *per se* transcends bourgeois ideology, but I believe that the *realist* novel, at least in its origins, is a fundamentally bourgeois form. More importantly, because I believe with Bakhtin that the novel can embody virtually *any* ideology or any form, my interest in the realist novel is more in the "realist" part of this designation than in the "novel" part, in the sense that I believe the markings of bourgeois ideology are attached more strongly to the "realist" side of this term than to the "novel" side. Like both Bakhtin and Jameson, however, I assume that even the realist novel can change significantly over time, as can bourgeois ideology itself. Indeed, any genre or form that is driven largely by the energies of bourgeois ideology must, of necessity, be complex, multiple, and able to change over time. When speaking of the realist novel, then, it is particularly important to consider historical contexts before drawing any conclusions about the political ramifications of any motifs in the text.

That literature can tell us a great deal about its historical context (and vice versa) is a point that might still have been debated by some (no doubt still operating under the influence of the New Criticism) when Jameson was writing *The Political Unconscious* in the late 1970s, but that argument has long been settled in favor of the affirmative. When viewed through the optic of Jameson's double hermeneutic, the value of studying literature to learn something about broader social and historical phenomena is particularly clear. After all, both "ideology" and "utopia" are concepts with an obvious and broad relevance to the real world, even if their role in literature is particularly clear. For one thing, a sizeable portion of the now immense Marxist critical tradition has involved ideological analysis of literary texts, with monumental achievements such as Georg Lukács's *The Historical Novel* (first published in the Soviet Union soon after its composition

there in 1936 and 1937, but not translated into English from the original German until 1962) standing as dazzling reminders of the value of such analysis. However, the patient unpacking of the ideological underpinnings of the works of authors such as Balzac, George Gissing, and Joseph Conrad that constitutes much of *The Political Unconscious* is probably the textbook example—literally, as the book has been used so often in college classes.

Of course, Jameson's assumption that literary texts are rooted in specific historical situations derives in important ways from the work of Lukács, just as his vision of literary texts as growing out of specific ideological roots derives in important ways from the work of Louis Althusser, who joins Antonio Gramsci as the most important modern Marxist theorists of ideology.⁸ Indeed, *The Political Unconscious* is (among many other things) an attempt to mediate the “historicism” debate that raged in Marxist intellectual circles in the 1960s and 1970s and to demonstrate that historical analysis (as exemplified by Lukács and English Marxist historians such as E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm) need not be incompatible with ideological analysis (as exemplified by Althusser). One might, in fact, justifiably restate Jameson's double hermeneutic in just these terms, replacing “utopia” with “history” as the focus that is combined with ideological analysis.

In any case, literature is the obvious place to look for utopian energies, especially if one adopts Jameson's position, derived largely from the work of Ernst Bloch, that the fundamental characteristic of utopian thought is simply an attempt to think otherwise and to imagine that the world might be different than it is.⁹ After all, all fiction is essentially engaged in the project of imagining alternative realities—and one might argue that this is especially the case for realist fiction, which attempts to envision worlds that are similar enough to the real world that their differences from reality potentially suggest changes that might be made in the real world.

For Bloch, utopian thought is not about imagining ideal societies but about attempting to stretch one's mind truly to grasp the notion that history is an ongoing process and that the "not-yet" can be fundamentally different from the "now."¹⁰ Thus, utopia is never achieved, but simply sought, in a never-ending process that I argue is quite similar to the process of seeking an authentic existence that lies at the heart of Sartrean existentialism. I thus use Jameson, Bloch, and Sartre in combination in seeking utopian energies in the texts I read in this dissertation.

Existentialism might not, at first glance, appear to be an obvious candidate to provide a theoretical framework for the discovery of utopian energies within literary texts. After all, existentialism has sometimes been associated with nihilism in philosophy and quietism in politics, on the assumption that, if life is meaningless, then no action is worthwhile.

Existentialism has its roots in the nineteenth century (Dostoevsky's texts are themselves considered important forebears), but the existential perspective became particularly prominent in Europe after the destruction of World War II and the outrages of fascism caused many to conclude that the Enlightenment notion of a rational world was a pipe dream and that life itself was not only meaningless, but absurd. Even, then, however, Sartre stood apart from other existentialists in the fundamental optimism of his outlook. For him, the fact that there is no inherent meaning in life is cause not to despair, but to celebrate; it is an opportunity to make one's own being, not a sentence to nothingness. On this view, the inherent meaninglessness of life should lead not to a call for quietism, but to attempts to build ethical and humane lives for individuals and systems for societies. For Sartre, "Quietism is the attitude of people who say, 'Let others do what I cannot do.' The doctrine I am presenting before you is precisely the opposite of this, since it declares that there is no reality except in action" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 4).

Sartre, himself an accomplished dramatist and novelist (as well as literary critic), firmly believed that literature itself was a key venue through which individuals could seek meaning and societies could find ethical coherence. He also saw literature as a key element in real-world political struggles, as well as a key focal point for utopian imaginings that go beyond the real world. Indeed, for him, literature not only helps us to imagine utopia, but utopia helps us to imagine literature. Thus, one key reason to even attempt to imagine an ideal society (though one knows that such a society cannot be reached) is that this attempt provides a sort of thought experiment that allows us to imagine what literature might be like in an ideal world, where it need not participate in the fight against injustice, but could simply be “conscious of itself; it would understand that form and content, public and subject, are identical, and that the formal freedom of saying and the material freedom of doing complete each other” (*Literature* 160).

As a form of literary criticism existentialism seeks to analyze literary works with a special emphasis on the struggle of the individual to define meaning and identity in the face of a hostile world. In Sartre’s case, this struggle takes a very specific form. Individuals first of all exist (in the mode he refers to as the “Being-in-itself”), but their existence is surrounded by a set of pre-existing values that constitutes their “facticity.” Individuals have a tendency to take the easy path of accepting this facticity, convincing themselves that the values thrust upon them are actually their own, thus moving through life in the mode Sartre refers to as “bad faith.” However, individuals are also free to challenge the authority of this facticity and to make their own paths in the world in a difficult, frightening, and ongoing quest for freedom that involves a perpetual process of negating one’s current self and striving to move toward a new, authentic existence in the mode Sartre refers to as the “Being-for-itself.”

Sartre's existentialist focus on the individual makes his philosophy particularly relevant to the analysis of literary characters, thus the importance of his work in my analysis of the character-driven fictions that I read in Chapters Four and Five. His thought provides an especially valuable way of teasing out the utopian inclinations of these texts, while reading them in their historical contexts helps to extend this analysis to make more general statements about realism as a whole and about the place of realism within the phenomenon of capitalist modernization. I thus combine Marxist historical readings with readings produced by Sartre's existentialist philosophy, a philosophy that Sartre himself eventually argued (after his turn to Marxism in 1960) was substantially compatible with Marxist historical analysis.¹¹ Indeed, my method of applying Sartre's vision of the existentialist subject making his or her own path in the world (within the constraints imposed by conditions that are not under their control) can essentially be seen as a version of Marx's dictum, stated in "The Eighteenth Brumaire," that "men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past" (Tucker 595).

If literature would seem to be the ideal place to seek utopian energies, it is by now a well-established principle of Marxist criticism that literature is also the ideal place to go to study ideology, given that literature serves as a sort of experimental laboratory where ideology can explore new ways to do its work, at the same time functioning there in simpler and more obvious ways. This vision of the role of ideology in literature (and art in general) has been greatly influenced by the theoretical work of Althusser, for whom the cultural sphere provided an especially transparent example of the kind of "Ideological State Apparatus" through which individual subjects were literally brought into being by bourgeois ideology. Indeed, my

understanding of ideology in this dissertation (like Jameson's in *The Political Unconscious*) is heavily influenced by Althusser's expansion of the concept beyond the traditional Marxist notion of ideology as "false consciousness," that is, as a constellation of attitudes and assumptions that distorts the way individual subjects perceive and interpret the world. In this notion, ideology is conceived as the opposite of science, which is designed to provide an unmediated and unbiased view of reality.¹² In Althusser's more general and more nuanced view, however, ideology is everywhere and all interpretations of reality are ideological: even science is ideological.¹³ Ideology, then, is not a network of illusions that disguise reality, but instead "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (109). Individual subjects are not duped by ideology, but literally produced by it, in the process he refers to as interpellation. In a very real sense, ideology is not something that hides reality, but the very texture of reality itself.

Althusser thus expands Marx's definition of ideology much in the same way that Lacan expands Freud's vision of fantasy; for Freud fantasy is something that hides reality, while for Lacan fantasy is very much the texture of reality. That said, bourgeois ideology, which will be the focus of my analyses of ideology in this dissertation, is particularly nefarious in that it operates in a constant mode of deception and disguise, attempting to declare its tenets as scientific truths and as simple "common sense," rather than as politically motivated interpretations. For example, a central element of bourgeois ideology is its emphasis on individualism and its declaration that each individual is special and important, capable of becoming an effective agent of history. Within this ideology, however, no real individualism is possible and each individual subject in fact obeys the commands of the capitalist system quite strictly, such obedience being necessary in order for such a complex economic system to operate

effectively. The capitalist system, meanwhile, is declared the only logical system possible, individualism thus becoming simply another name for a division of labor that disguises and obfuscates the unfairness of that division and of the economic inequality it fosters. Again, however, this constant operation of hiding exploitation within a rhetoric of individual liberty and equality does not simply disguise reality: in the capitalist system this sort of disguise *is* reality.

Althusser's most important protégé, Pierre Macherey, has provided a particularly clear development of the notion that ideological operations that might be imperceptible in the real world become visible in literature.¹⁴ Macherey's focus is on the possibility that literature has a special potential for revealing the ideological forces that are much more hidden in the society at large, thus potentially providing Marxist critics with a weapon to use in the battle against bourgeois ideology, which by its very nature seeks to hide itself and to disguise its political agenda as a simple quest for scientific truth. Macherey, in a mode reminiscent of Bakhtin in a number of ways, argues that literary language engages in productive dialogues with a variety of other forms of language, deriving much of its ideological power from the way its language is able to mimic and parody these other discourses: "Mingling the real uses of language in an endless confrontation, it concludes by *revealing* their truth. Experimenting with language rather than inventing it, the literary work is both the analogy of a knowledge and a caricature of customary ideology" (59). The object of representation of literary language, for Macherey as for Bakhtin, is not physical reality, but language itself. Literary language is "a contestation of language rather than a representation of reality" (61). In short, as Booker puts it, for Macherey "literary language makes visible ideological orientations within language that might remain hidden in the discourse of the everyday world" (*Practical* 83).

This is not to say that literature exists in some sort of ideal, pure world of linguistic abstractions. Far from it: literary language engages in dialogues with other forms of language as a means of establishing contact and engaging in dialogue with the real historical world. One must, thus, always historicize, and it is just such historicization that I seek to accomplish in this dissertation. I begin this task in Chapter Two with a discussion of the ideological underpinnings of *Mary Barton* and *Hard Times*, both of which appeared at a time when questions concerning the plight of the working class, or of the “poor,” had become central to English political discourse, partly due to the pressure exerted by working-class agitation abroad. Both of these texts are overtly concerned with improving the lot of the working class; both therefore assume that it is *possible* to improve this lot (without, however, changing the fundamental structure of the English social and economic system) and therefore contain fairly obvious utopian dimensions. At the same time, both *Mary Barton* and *Hard Times* are thoroughly bourgeois texts, written by bourgeois writers and intended for the consumption of bourgeois readers. Careful analysis shows that, however sympathetic to the working class they might be at the surface level of content, their ideological sub-structure (their political unconscious) is entirely bourgeois in its orientation. These texts are perfectly happy to contribute to reforms that might improve conditions for the poor, but only if these improvements also strengthen a system that is fundamentally designed to work to the advantage of the rich.

This is not to say that novelists such as Dickens and Gaskell were insincere in their desire to improve the lot of England’s working class. Indeed, both were involved in real-world activism and advocacy as well as in the writing of fiction. English realist novelists were often more than mere social commentators; they were also social activists who sought to engage contemporary social and political issues directly, focusing on class, labor, and gender relations, as well as on

social unrest and the growing tension between rich and poor in England and the horrific conditions in which the majority of England's working class lived. But these concerns were particularly reflected in the novels of writers such as Dickens, who particularly addressed the poverty and living conditions of the lower class as well as the corruption and the inefficiency of the legal system, which he thought doubly oppressed the lower class through its failure to administer the poor laws properly. Meanwhile, even when such writers did engage in real-world activism, they often did so in ways that were actually designed to discourage more radical activism on the part of the working class. Thus, Gaskell highlighted the relationship between the master and the laborer in her novels, but was suspicious of real-world trade unions and argued that real progress required action by the bourgeoisie on behalf of workers rather than action by the workers themselves.

Of course, the very notion that the novel can perform socially useful functions (rather than simply serving as entertainment or as some sort of purely aesthetic object) is itself bourgeois, a part of the determinedly practical-minded, problem-solving nature of bourgeois thought. Little wonder, then, that novelists such as Dickens and Gaskell might have imagined that novels could help to solve the crisis in working-class lifestyles that plagued mid-nineteenth-century England—or that they might have failed in helping to solve those problems.

Such novels as *Mary Barton* and *Hard Times* belong to the category of “industrial” or “social-problem” fiction, the implication being that they clearly seek not merely to document social problems, but to strive toward solutions for them. Such fiction, Rosemarie Bodenheimer notes, is

distinguished by its focus on specific social problems raised during the process of industrialization. These novels set themselves in a dramatic way to the task of giving fictional shape to social questions that were experienced as new, unpredictable, without closure. (Bodenheimer 4)

For Bodenheimer, such novels failed in the task of solving these social problems because of the intractability of the problems themselves, but my argument in Chapter Two is that the novels failed in their task largely because the solutions they propose remain limited (by the bourgeois ideology that drives them) to ones that do not allow for fundamental and sweeping changes that might threaten the class-based system of capitalism itself.

In Chapter Three I focus on “The Overcoat” and *Crime and Punishment*, both of which are among the key texts of nineteenth-century Russian realism, with Gogol’s story having somewhat of the status of a founding text and Dostoevsky’s providing an exemplar of its mature form. Both texts, however, are informed by a rather idealized vision of traditional Russian society, and both are informed by utopian visions of a genteel, family-oriented, religion-driven society free of all contaminating influence from the decadent West. However problematic these visions might be (especially from a Marxist perspective, from which they provide exactly the sort of “bad” utopia of which the Marxist tradition has been suspicious since its beginning¹⁵), they are at least clear. Indeed, Jameson’s basic premise would suggest that we should take even this sort of utopian vision seriously, teasing out its positive aspects (such as an emphasis on community, rather than competition) in ways that might be instructive for us in the project of moving forward toward a socialist future. For my purposes of ideological analysis, what is important is that these two texts, so strongly anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois on their surface, in fact serve as inadvertent carriers of bourgeois ideology in a number of ways, having to do both with the specific content of the texts and with the realist mode in which they are written, a mode, I will argue, that contains inherently bourgeois energies.

In both Chapter Two and Chapter Three I employ relatively straightforward Marxist techniques of ideological analysis, looking at the ways in which the texts appear to assume,

endorse, adopt, confirm, or otherwise express various attitudes that are typical of bourgeois ideology. For example, all four of the principal works examined in these two chapters focus on the activities of one or a few individual characters and appear to accept the bourgeois notion that individuals are the primary agents of action in the world. However, many of the ideological characteristics I examine are embedded in the mode of realism itself, such as in the assumption that actions unfold in a logical sequence dictated by cause-and-effect, much in the manner of history itself. Importantly, however, the bourgeois ideology of the English texts exerts a fundamentally conservative effect, as when both Dickens and Gaskell depict working-class violence (and especially revolution) as horrifying, irrational, and counterproductive. However, in Russia, where the bourgeoisie were far from establishing their hegemony in the nineteenth century and where the prevailing climate was still primarily pre-bourgeois, bourgeois ideology is a largely progressive force, pulling the texts of writers such as Gogol and Dostoevsky to the left of the regressive political position intended by their authors.

If Chapter Three argues that the texts of Gogol and Dostoevsky are more progressive than they might first appear, then Chapter Four argues that the novels of Hardy are more optimistic than they have generally seemed to be to most readers. Produced during a period of crisis in which the English economy was in a state of near collapse and the English press was full of reports of the declining health and living conditions of the English working class, it is not surprising that Hardy's texts might be pessimistic, though they also take on a special pessimism because of their focus on an agrarian social milieu that was rapidly being swept away by history. However, I find significant utopian resonances in these two Hardy novels, many of which are inherent to their realist mode, but many of which inhere in Hardy's particular mode of characterization, especially as read through the existentialist philosophy of Sartre.

In the case of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, I find that the central character, Michael Henchard, fails to make his own history because he declines the many opportunities that are offered him to break free of the constraints of the past. He thus remains trapped in the Sartrean “facticity” of the past, mired in the inauthentic mode of the Being-in-itself; he also becomes an allegorical figure of a traditional society that is rapidly headed toward the dustbin of history in the wake of the triumph of capitalist modernity. In the meantime, he is opposed in the text by the younger, more flexible, and more modern (that is, more bourgeois) Donald Farfrae, who is willing to take advantage of the opportunity to break free of the facticity of the past and to explore his freedom going forward toward the authentic mode of what Sartre calls the Being-for-itself. Jude Fawley, the protagonist of *Jude the Obscure* is similar to Farfrae in serving as a figure of the individual who continually strives to break free of imposed bonds and to explore an authentic, ever-evolving life. He is also a perfect illustration of certain specifically Marxist (as exemplified in the work of Bloch and Jameson) modes of utopian thought that emphasize the quest for utopia rather than the actual achievement of it. Jude fails to achieve his ambitious goals, but he does break free of many inherited modes of thought and continues to explore new territory almost to the very end.

Notes from Underground, one of the texts I examine in Chapter Five, is seemingly composed of the misanthropic ramblings of an embittered narrator/protagonist who sees little point to making his own history or doing anything else other than complain endlessly. However, Dostoevsky’s text (as Bakhtin has noted) actually includes a number of Menippean carnivalesque energies that make it far livelier and more optimistic than it would at first appear to be. Sartrean analysis, in particular, shows that the Underground Man has actually succeeded in moving beyond his initial facticity and negating his Being-in-itself, though he remains trapped, during

the period of the text, in the nihilation of the self that must come before the generation of an authentic selfhood in the Being-for-itself. In this sense, Tolstoy's *Ivan Ilyich* makes an especially appropriate pairing with Dostoevsky's because its narrator has remained thoroughly and resolutely trapped in facticity and the Being-in-itself throughout his numbingly bourgeois life, only to achieve transcendence and the Being-for-itself shortly before his death. This optimistic reading of the ending not only provides a strong critique of the bourgeois conformism that had previously dominated Ivan Ilyich's life, but it also suggests (in a resolutely utopian way) that this conformism can be overcome and that it need not be allowed to dominate the lives of individuals.

Together, my readings of these eight texts verify the importance of reading texts from a dialectical perspective that would seek both to understand the ideologies that lie behind the texts and to uncover the (often unstated) utopian energies that inform the texts as well. By reading both English and Russian texts, which arise from such different historical situations in the nineteenth century, I also demonstrate that reading literary texts through the double optic of ideology and utopia can tell us a great deal about their historical contexts, just as a consideration of historical context can provide crucial information in the understanding of the literary texts being read. One should indeed, I conclude, always historicize.

Notes

¹ The notion that ideology and utopia are twinned concepts that should be analyzed in tension with one another goes back to the classic work of pioneering sociologist Karl Mannheim (a former student of Georg Lukács), especially in *Ideology and Utopia*, first published in German in 1929.

² Note on translations of the Russian texts discussed in this dissertation: Language and style are themselves key carriers of ideology in a literary text, as Jameson (among many others) has emphasized. For this reason, though my approach in this dissertation does not involve close reading or careful stylistic analysis, I have endeavored to employ what are widely regarded as the best available translations of the Russian works that are being discussed. In the case of “The Overcoat” and both Dostoevsky texts, the much-admired translations by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky were selected as meeting this criterion. In the case of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, however, the growing consensus seems to be that the recent (2014) translation by Peter Carson is now the best available. William Giraldi, for example, has declared that Carson’s translation is “sure to be the benchmark for decades to come.” I therefore used the Carson translation of Tolstoy’s novella.

³ Or note Christopher Caudwell's somewhat more economic argument that the increase in commercial printing, which is part and parcel of the rise of the novel, results in a situation in which the artist, once dependent upon patrons for direct support and thus directly connected at least to that small audience, now writes for an audience to which he or she has no direct connection other than the economic one, inevitably tending toward the commodification of art (*Illusion and Reality* 86).

⁴ Interestingly, Marx himself, in Volume I of *Capital*, evinces Robinson Crusoe as a paradigm of the bourgeois individual (Tucker 324).

⁵ Also see Firdous Azim's *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (1993), which usefully extends Watt’s analysis to discuss the important role played by colonialism in providing material for novels and in stimulating the novelistic imaginations of both writers and readers.

⁶ See, for example, Franco Moretti’s *The Way of the World* for a spirited argument that the nineteenth-century French bildungsroman (which for Moretti is the paradigm of bourgeois realism) is far more interesting than its English counterpart.

⁷ Bakhtin, with his broad sense of what actually constitutes a novel, would no doubt regard all of the Russian works I discuss as novels, or at least as being extensively “novelized.”

⁸ Gramsci, writing in obscurity in prison in the 1920s and the 1930s, was the first major Marxist theorist to give shape to the notion that ideology was the primary tool by which the bourgeoisie maintained their power over the much more numerous working class. It was,

however, Althusser's groundbreaking theorization of ideology in the 1960s that brought sophisticated analysis of ideology to the forefront of Marxist critique.

⁹ For a useful survey of Marxist visions of utopia, focusing especially on the work of Bloch, see Freedman.

¹⁰ For an excellent introduction to Bloch's work, see the collection edited by Daniel and Moylan.

¹¹ Jameson discusses at length the congruence between Marxism and Sartrean existentialism in his chapter on Sartre in *Marxism and Form*. And, of course, it should be noted that Jameson's own interest in Sartre is long-lived, dating back to Jameson's own doctoral dissertation on Sartre, eventually published as *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (1961).

¹² For a succinct review of theories of ideology from Marx through Althusser, see McLellan.

¹³ Althusser here continues trend toward broadening the concept of ideology that was begun with the work of Mannheim. Of course, Marx himself already treated ideology in a far more nuanced way than did most of the Marxist thinkers who came immediately after him.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault was also a student of Althusser, but his work did not follow on Althusser's as directly as did Macherey's. Nevertheless, Foucault's broad conception of the notion of "power" has a great deal in common with the way Althusser envisions ideology.

¹⁵ A key founding text of this tradition is Engels' 1880 text "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" (Tucker 683–717), though here the term "utopian" is associated with what I am here calling "bad" utopias, while "scientific" is associated with more practical or "good" utopias.

Chapter Two

Meet the New Boss: Preserving Capitalism in

Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*

In his classic text *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (published in German in 1845), Friedrich Engels not only elaborates some of the grim conditions of life among the workers of early industrial England, but also makes clear that these workers were themselves a new historical phenomenon. The poor had long been a social “problem” in England, but now the rise of capitalism had transformed at least a portion of the poor into an emerging proletariat. They were thus not simply victims of capitalist oppression and exploitation, but also the potential gravediggers of the capitalist system itself, an idea that Engels and his new partner Karl Marx would elaborate much further a few years later in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). Indeed, Engels seeks in his 1845 text not merely to describe the often horrific conditions under which England's new proletariat lived and worked, but to announce the virtual inevitability of a proletarian revolution driven by the pressure of these conditions. Further, Engels celebrates the inevitability of this revolution, which might explain why his book did not appear in English until 1887 (in America)—and not until 1892 in Britain.

Engels proposes the idea that the bourgeoisie's attitude toward the proletariat depends purely on self-interest—monetary gain is the only thing that ties the bourgeoisie to the proletariat. Their relationship with them “has nothing human in it; it is purely economic” (113). Engels also argues that it is not society's improvement that the bourgeoisie seek, as they are the most amoral class in England: “It is utterly indifferent to the English bourgeois whether his

working-men starve or not, if only he makes money. All the conditions of life are measured by money, and what brings no money is nonsense, unpractical, idealistic bosh” (111).

Engels was, of course, unusually insightful, especially for one so young. (He was twenty-four years old when he completed this, his first book.) At the same time, his recognition that the conditions of life for Britain’s workers were untenable and unsustainable was hardly unique. For example, Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848) is a fictional account of the hardships suffered by the working class in Manchester during the years 1839 to 1842, almost exactly the time (1842-1844) that Engels spent in the same city researching his own book. A few years later, Charles Dickens published his novel *Hard Times* (1854), which also draws upon concerns about the conditions that England’s workers were being forced to endure in the fictional industrial town of Coketown, possibly based on the real city of Preston, but also having much in common with Manchester. Manchester is the key for both Dickens and Gaskell, since her book is based directly on Manchester and his Coketown clearly resembles Manchester in many ways.

At first glance, *Mary Barton* and *Hard Times*, by detailing the difficulties suffered by the working poor as a social (rather than individual) problem, would seem to be at odds with some of the central impulses of the realist novel, which (as Fredric Jameson has summarized it) has often been seen to serve “the ideological function of adapting its readers to bourgeois society as it currently exists, with its premium on comfort and inwardness, on individualism, on the acceptance of money as an ultimate reality” (*Antinomies* 5). A closer look, however, shows that these novels are designed precisely to protect the comfort and security of the British bourgeoisie. If (like Engels’s study) they see the current conditions of the working class as unacceptable, their principal impulse is not to herald, or even encourage a proletarian revolt, but simply to outline some of the reasons why such a revolt might be a real possibility—and one that must at all costs

be avoided. The bourgeoisie, after all, prefer to fight by more nefarious means. As Engels notes, “Social war is avowedly raging in England ... and it is in the interest of the bourgeoisie to conduct this hypocritically, under the disguise of peace and even philanthropy” (113, my ellipsis). The novels of Dickens and Gaskell perform a kind of literary philanthropy in which they appear to be bestowing charity upon the working class, but they in fact work to strengthen and perpetuate the power of the bourgeoisie. By furthering the “social and political omnipotence of the bourgeoisie” (Engels 214), they urge the bourgeoisie to take action to preserve and protect their own cushy existence. The English realist novel in general served as a medium to sustain the power of the bourgeoisie and cause it to flourish, and the “social” novels of writers such as Dickens and Gaskell are no exception. Political discourse and rational debate are deployed in such a way as to assume a legitimate presumed political consciousness, all of which is part of the bourgeois ideology.

Engels strives to galvanize the working class against the bourgeoisie, in order for them to gain social mobility. He warns them of being susceptible to bourgeois ideology, of being tempted to believe that the bourgeoisie are the world’s greatest benefactors to humanity when they give out their insignificant charity, which is truly money that belongs to the proletariat, whose labor generated it in the first place. He believes that “the only help for the working-men consists of laying bare the true state of things and destroying this hypocrisy” (113). Engels believes that for the bourgeoisie, giving out seemingly benevolent charity is a way of buying peace of mind, of not being exposed to the hardships and miseries of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie are aware that the proletariat cannot survive the acute conditions they subject them to and as a result will perish; however, they prefer that the working class suffer “[concealed] under the vilest hypocrisy” (118), unseen and away from the bourgeoisie’s sight. Engels reasons that this way of treating the

proletariat in itself is “the most open declaration of war of the bourgeoisie upon the proletarian” (118), and therefore, “the only possible solution is a violent revolution, which cannot fail to take place” (119).

Marx named Dickens and Gaskell among the “splendid” contemporary English writers

whose graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all of the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together. (qtd. in Baxandale and Morawski 105)

In *Hard Times*, it is easy to see these “political and social truths” as encompassing the exploitative nature of a capitalist system that drives workers such as Stephen Blackpool to their doom. And it is certainly the case that many observers have seen a powerful potential in the critique of the condition of workers that is embedded in the novel. In *The Politics of Civil Society*, Fred Powell argues that the social novel is a form of active citizenship—a potent force of criticism of the acute social abuses caused by the bourgeoisie against the working-class, one that inspired real-world activism as well:

The volunteers were inspired by a new genre of the social novel that emerged during the 19th century. Charles Dickens (1812-70), who was to pioneer the social novel with *Oliver Twist*, published in 1838 in the wake of the harsh Poor Law Reform Act, revealed a deep sympathy for the poor and a personal hatred of social injustice. [The novels] evoke the brutal and callous world of Victorian poverty. *Hard Times* (1854) demonstrates Dickens’ very active social conscience. Social protest was also a core element in his work, but it was obscured by his primary commitment to literature. Nonetheless, he was to inspire a generation of social activists in the Anglo-Saxon world who turned to volunteerism and reformism as the means to change a deeply unjust social order. (83)

A close look at *Hard Times* shows that Dickens seems to have structured the novel according to a series of what might at first glance be figured as polar oppositions between the soul-destroying character of industrial capitalism and more humane alternatives. However, a closer look shows that all of these humane alternatives remain thoroughly inscribed within the

confines of bourgeois ideology; they offer no genuine challenge to bourgeois hegemony of the sort offered by Engels—and by Marx himself. George Bernard Shaw, in an introduction to an edition of *Hard Times*, declared that Dickens was, like Marx, a revolutionary—except that Marx knew he was a revolutionary and Dickens did not (cited in Mazzeno 55). Still, Dickens’ real project, of which he is entirely aware, is to help preserve the capitalist system by advising the bourgeoisie to take certain steps to improve the conditions of the working class and thereby prevent revolution.

On the other hand, Dickens’ novels are complicated (and, to an extent, enriched) by the fact that he is not comfortably situated within the bourgeois class, but is in fact, as Terry Eagleton has emphasized, a marginal member of that class. He was a member of the petty bourgeoisie, clinging to the lower fringes of the upper class and thus able to draw upon elements “from the ideological realms of both dominant and dominated classes in the social formation” (*Criticism* 126). It is this unique, liminal class position that is responsible for much of the famed multiplicity of Dickens’ novels, which corresponds to the multiplicity of an early industrial capitalism that was still in the historical process of defining itself. Thus, “the unity of a novel in Dickens’ case is therefore not readily apparent. ... There is one author controlling the novel as a whole, but his relation to reality tends to preserve the living fragments of the world around him” (Vaupotic 8, my ellipsis).

This chapter’s analysis, however, suggests that Dickens himself is nevertheless steeped in bourgeois ideology more than he (or Eagleton) realizes, and many of the observations that Dickens and many of his critics have seemed to regard as anti-capitalist are in fact pro-capitalist. For example, multiplicity itself is a key characteristic of bourgeois ideology. Further, Dickens’ lack of historical sense significantly diminishes the utopian potential of his novels by removing

any narrative path through which genuine systemic change might be achieved. Eric Auerbach notes that, despite his “strong social feeling” and the “suggestive density of his social milieu,” Dickens is not adept at representing the process of historical change and shows “almost no trace of the fluidity of the political and historical background” (492). Georg Lukács, while following Marx in expressing considerable admiration for Dickens’ ability to present in his novels the entire social background of his Victorian society, notes that Dickens is nevertheless severely limited by the “weakness of his petty bourgeois humanism and idealism” (*Historical* 243). In particular, Lukács sees Dickens as less affected by the decline in historical sense that infects the work of other contemporary English novelists: “Nineteenth century capitalism resulting in a growing fragmentation in life” led to the bourgeoisie becoming “a reactionary class” as opposed to “a revolutionary class, and its literature consequently begins to decline in quality.” The conservatism they reverted to caused a “distortion and deterioration of realism” (Booker, *Practical* 75). Lukács nevertheless argues that Dickens’ work loses historical force because of a tendency to treat private experience as entirely separate from public history—though he also concludes that this tendency is stronger in historical novels such as *A Tale of Two Cities* than in novels set in Dickens’ contemporary England.

A Tale of Two Cities is particularly instructive because of the horror with which Dickens presents the violence of the French Revolution in that text. There is in fact, an element of outright mockery with which he describes the poor Frenchmen who have just stormed the Bastille, thinking they have achieved a great deal but in fact achieving nothing but destruction, leaving them in a condition as bad as or worse than before:

The miserable bakers’ shops were beset by long files of them, patiently waiting to buy bad bread; and while they waited with stomachs faint and empty, they beguiled the time by embracing one another on the triumphs of the day, and achieving them again in gossip. (*A Tale of Two Cities* 155)

Hard Times acknowledges in all of its aspects (from the title on down) that conditions are grim for the poor in early-nineteenth-century England. But the novel maintains Dickens' horror of revolution as a remedy throughout, even as it criticizes certain institutions, practices, and attitudes, especially utilitarianism.¹ Coketown in particular functions in the text as an allegorical embodiment of the most dehumanizing consequences of capitalism and as a kind of satirical extension of utilitarianism to its logical conclusion. Coketown is described as ugly and "unnatural," polluted and noisy, largely because of the work that goes on there. In fact, it is a city devoted entirely to the capitalist enterprise, described as "a triumph of fact" containing nothing that is not practical, useful, or "severely workful" (29).

This intense and cold-hearted devotion to utility can be seen as the polar opposite of Dickens' famed sentimentality, one of the traits most often associated with his work—though it was widely present in the work of other authors of the time as well. One might certainly see this sentimentality as a counter to capitalist practicality, the profound pathos of the Cratchits opposed to the heartlessness of Scrooge, as it were.

Dickens appealed to the idea that we share a common humanity beyond social division. He did so in order to fight what was fast becoming the reality of bourgeois society: its lack of common interests. Appealing to the "good" side of bourgeois society against its "bad" side is something we see in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and the way in which the heartless, tight-fisted Scrooge becomes a generous benefactor of the poor. Sentimental, yes, but it was a protest against the notion that there was no alternative. (Jenkins)

However, sentimentality itself has long been a key tool of bourgeois ideological manipulation. In his article, "On Strike," for example, Dickens makes quite clear his belief that sentiment is a key not to overturning the capitalist system, but to shoring it up by establishing better relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (while maintaining their distinctly different class positions):

[Into] the relations between employers and employed, as into all the relations of this life, there must enter something of feeling and sentiment; something of mutual explanation, forbearance, and consideration; something which is not to be found in Mr. McChulloch's dictionary, and is not exactly stable in figures; otherwise those relations are wrong and are rotten at the core and will never bear sound fruit. (553)

Further, as Booker notes, it is also the case that Dickens' sentimentality acts primarily not to inspire social action, but to help him

to sell more books and therefore to obtain an income that sets him apart from the working class. Despite his frequently sentimental depiction of the plight of the unfortunate, Dickens is invariably contemptuous of the working class in any legitimate political sense. His horror of mass political action in works such as *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Barnaby Rudge* is quite clear, as is his overall message: the poor should be pitied, perhaps given charity, but they should never be allowed to take collective action to alleviate their poverty. (Ulysses 148)

Meanwhile, Dickens' racism and Eurocentrism are by now also well known, and his reaction to the 1857 Indian Mutiny—essentially an anticipation of Kurtz's "exterminate the brutes" and an early adoption of today's kill-all-Muslims mentality—shows the severe limits of his famed sentimentality when faced with the prospect of genuine difference.²

Similarly, Dickens' emphasis on Coketown's devotion to (cold, hard) "fact," as opposed to the fancy and imagination that he sets against this devotion, ultimately shows the limits of Dickens' own fancy and imagination, which are never able to break free of the bonds of bourgeois ideology or to understand that capitalism is an inherently fanciful system built on lies and subterfuge. As Eagleton notes in a different context (addressing the postmodern assault on Truth as a tool of repression), capitalism thrives on "gross deception, whitewash, cover-up, and lying through one's teeth." As a result,

the true facts—concealed, suppressed, distorted—can be in themselves politically explosive; and those who have developed the nervous tic of placing such vulgar terms as "truth" and "fact" in fastidiously distancing scare quotes should be careful to avoid a certain collusion between their

own high-toned theoretical gestures and the most banal, routine political strategies of the capitalist power-structure. (*Ideology* 379)

In addition, though Dickens does indeed clearly oppose the notions of fancy and imagination to the world of workaday capitalism, these notions are not anti-capitalist in themselves. Concepts such as “fancy” and “imagination” are quintessential components of the bourgeois ideological superstructure. Individuals whose minds dwell in the realm of fancy and imagination are not likely to engage in the kind of political thought that can lead to effective collective action. Fancy and imagination, as it were, supply the circus that works in tandem with the bread of the capitalist economic system.

As it turns out, *Hard Times* features an actual circus, much to the horror of the ultra-utilitarian (and ultra-bourgeois) Mr. Gradgrind. Thus, when Mr. Gradgrind discovers his children Tom and Louisa taking a peek at Sleary’s circus, he excoriates them for their irresponsibility. “I should,” he tells Mrs. Gradgrind with horror, “as soon have expected to find my children reading poetry” (24). Mrs. Gradgrind then pitches in to suggest that she would prefer for her children to spend their time studying the science that they learn as part of their utilitarian education: “As if ... you couldn’t go and look at the shells and minerals and things provided for you, instead of circuses!” (24, my ellipsis). The Gradgrinds associate science with “proper education,” while they associate the circus (seemingly a working-class entertainment) with pointless recreation. What they fail to understand is that, within the workings of bourgeois ideology, such recreation is not pointless at all but is part of an ideological strategy to reinforce bourgeois power. Even when such entertainments are aimed at primarily working-class audiences, they do not necessarily contribute to the development of proletarian class consciousness but simply divert their audiences from thinking about the capitalist system that exploits them on a daily basis.

Dickens himself makes clear his own view that fancy and imagination should be cultivated among the members of the working class, not so much to enrich their impoverished lives as to render them politically inert. Thus, Dickens' narrator warns his bourgeois audiences that they should encourage "the utmost grace of the fancies and affections" in the working class for the protection of the bourgeois system; otherwise, the working class will live lives so devoid of meaning that they will be driven to revolution, and "reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you" (166).

That Gradgrind regards attending the circus as roughly equivalent to reading poetry suggests the extent to which literature is also included in this sweeping indictment of entertainment; Dickens seems to have clearly designed this to indicate the philistine limits of Gradgrind's vision. Dickens, obviously a proponent of the literary, clearly wants to associate utilitarianism with this kind of philistinism. Literature, however much its purposiveness might be without purpose, serves a central function in the promulgation of bourgeois ideology and thus of capitalist power. Therefore, in championing imaginative activities such as poetry—or, for that matter circuses—as an antidote to the grinding monotony of the capitalist system, Dickens is not so much striking a blow against capitalism as providing a reminder that the capitalist base needs superstructural support in order to function effectively.

Among other things, entertainments such as circuses (or literature) serve to provide temporary relief from the oppression of capitalism, thus making the capitalist system more bearable (and more stable). Coketown itself is a bastion of sameness and monotony, filled with houses that are all identical little boxes inhabited by people who all look just the same:

It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day

was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next. (28)

Coketown, in short, is the epitome of the phenomena of rationalization and routinization that Max Weber associates with the historical process of capitalist modernization. The town also stands as a model for all the real-life great towns in England in the nineteenth century. Engels exposes the degradation of the working-class living environment as being associated with “hypocritical town planning” in these great towns: “Space was organized in such a way that would properly serve the interests of the advantageous class, that is to say the bourgeoisie” (Engels 13). Dickens describes how Coketown is unnaturally arranged:

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. (28)

The industrial town is crowded by high, crooked buildings and factories covered with the soot that comes from the coal burned in the factories, all of which pollute the town and are owned by one person: rich, greedy Josiah Bounderby.

The town itself is informed by polar oppositions, with the rich areas (in the outskirts, surrounded by nature) strictly separated from the poor areas (amid the squalor of the city). Dickens points out how the town is purposefully made to isolate the working-class people and the poisonous atmosphere they are forced to breathe from the rich bourgeoisie: “Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gasses were bricked in” (68). Stone Lodge, the Gradgrind residence, is located “on a moor within a mile or two of . . . Coketown” (17). Social hierarchy is

represented effectively by these contrasting images. This also parallels Engels' observation of London and its separate territories that "push the slum dwellers out of sight, if not yet out of existence" (qtd. in Smith 73). Hidden alleys are within walking distance of the homes of the rich, but they are totally removed from the sight of the upper class. Engels also concludes that "in this part of town, people of the working class only are to be seen" (Engels 29).

Upon Louisa Gradgrind's visit to Stephen Blackpool's cellar apartment to offer help when Bounderby fires him, Louisa is shocked as she walks in, indicating that she had been totally unaware of the conditions in which the poor live, although only "a mile or two" separate her from them. Through her visit Dickens also illustrates that Louisa has been a victim of her utilitarian education, which has kept her completely from seeing those people through a humane lens, and suggests that the bourgeoisie can be ignorant rather than evil:

For the first time in her life, Louisa had come into one of the dwellings of the Coketown hands; for the first time in her life, she was face to face with them. . . . She knew of their existence by hundreds and by thousands. She knew what results in work a given number of them would produce, in a given space of time. She knew them in crowds passing to and from their nests, like ants or beetles. But she knew from her reading infinitely more of the ways of toiling insects than of these toiling men and women. (160)

Louisa's shock at the living conditions of the working class also parallels what Engels describes about the city of Manchester: "The town itself is particularly built, so that someone can live in it for years and travel into it and out of it daily without ever coming into contact with a working class quarter or even workers" (19). Engels also expresses astonishment: "I have never elsewhere seen a concealment of such fine sensibility of everything that might offend the eyes and nerves of the middle class" (21). Louisa's sympathy and acknowledgment of the working-class masses as individuals keeps her bourgeois position from being threatened, and at the same time garners

the consent of the working-class people. Rachel, for example, expresses her gratitude to her, saying, “Bless you for thinking o’ the poor lad wi’ such tenderness” (162).

The utilitarian school of Coketown is managed by Bounderby’s friend, Mr. Gradgrind—a man of “facts,” a rich politician in Parliament, and an education reformer in whose school students learn only about facts. In the depiction of the school, Dickens attacks the harsh social mechanization of children through Gradgrind’s inability to recognize the children’s innate humanity.

The conformity into which people are pressed by the capitalist system of Coketown is, for Dickens, very much opposed to the natural human condition. As Raymond Williams notes, Dickens characteristically (in *Hard Times* and elsewhere) sees people as almost infinitely diverse, as centrally informed by “emphatic differences and contrasts” (*Country* 153). On the surface, then, this description of the numbing monotony of life in Coketown would seem to oppose its capitalist conformism to the diversity of nature (human or otherwise). However, as Williams also points out, what Coketown really contrasts with is the bustling and vibrant diversity of Dickens’ London, a city informed by anything but “repressive uniformity” (153). In short, the opposition is not between capitalism and nature, but between “bad” capitalism and “good” capitalism. After all, while capitalism might in practice often produce conformism (as embodied in the interchangeable parts of the identical products produced on factory assembly lines), it tends more generally to thrive on diversity. As Eagleton (calling into question the notion that postmodern pluralism is somehow inherently subversive of capitalism) notes, “Capitalism is the most pluralistic order history has ever known, restlessly transgressing boundaries and dismantling oppositions, pitching together diverse life-forms and continually overflowing the measure” (*Illusions* 133).

Dickens' alternative to capitalist Coketown is, then, even more characteristically capitalist than Coketown itself, and Coketown becomes from this perspective not an embodiment of capitalism, but a perversion of it. Ultimately, Dickens wants not to bury capitalism, but to praise it, to insist that the solution to woes such as those found in Coketown is to be found within the system that created Coketown to begin with. Even the book's opposition between Coketown and nature does not stand as a critique of capitalism. Dickens treats capitalism itself not as opposed to nature but as a second nature; in other words like any good bourgeois thinker, Dickens regards capitalism as a natural system organically grown from the soil of history, free of class interests or ideology.

Dickens' vision of Coketown as a realm of monotonous sameness has a temporal dimension as well. If one street is the same as the next, one day is also the same as the next. The possibility of change, on the other hand, is seen as a liberating alternative to this sameness. Again, however, it is hardly an alternative to capitalism itself. However horrified he was by the event, Balzac understood that capitalism is fundamentally inscribed in a process of historical change; it swept in with the French Revolution and transformed nineteenth-century French society in its wake. Dickens seems to have no such understanding, perhaps because his English society was so much more stable and so much less involved in a process of radical transformation.

If Dickens seems to feel that capitalism, at least as practiced in Coketown, impedes change, he envisions the natural passage of time, which inevitably brings certain changes, as a force competing with and opposed to capitalism. However, by envisioning an opposition between capitalism and time specifically in terms of competition, Dickens once again falls back on a central capitalist metaphor in his attempt to think outside of capitalism. In addition, unlike

Balzac, Dickens misses the key point emphasized so memorably by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* that capitalism is, first and foremost, all about change:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudice and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, in his relations with his kind. (6)

Meanwhile, the opposition between stagnation and change is really just another version of Dickens' explicit contrast in *Hard Times* between two different kinds of time. First is the factory time of Coketown, as measured by the novel's "statistical clock," which "measured every second with a rap like a beat upon a coffin-lid" (99). This clock breaks down the flow of time into separate seconds, each disconnected from the flow of time, standing alone as a reified unit available for exploitation for capitalist profit. This is the classic industrial capitalist time as illuminated by E. P. Thompson long ago, who argued that the spread of industrial capitalism was crucially enabled by this marshaling of time as an instrument of production, to be measured by the clock, so that "new labour habits were formed, and a new time-discipline was imposed" ("Time" 90).

For Thompson this new time-discipline replaced the older way of thinking about time in long continuous units related to the cycles of nature. This older version of temporality is precisely the one that Dickens opposes to that fragmentary time of the statistical clock in *Hard Times*. Dickens refers to this longer, slower, more continuous vision of time as "the great manufacturer." This kind of time, represented by seasons or lifetimes, occurs over long periods and is related to natural processes that capitalism presumably cannot control: "Less inexorable than iron, steel, and brass, it brought its varying seasons even into that wilderness of smoke and

brick, and made the only stand that ever was made in the place against its direful uniformity” (“Time” 94). On the other hand, it is telling that, even when Dickens consciously attempts to envision a force opposed to capitalism, he describes that force via a metaphor (“the great manufacturer”) that is derived directly from capitalism. In other words, even when he specifically attempts to do so, Dickens is unable to think beyond the bourgeois ideology that thoroughly informs his writing and his view of the world.

It might be noted, by the way, that the opposition posited in *Hard Times* between a flowing, moving time “the great manufacturer” and an essentially static “statistical” time quite closely resembles the opposition recently suggested by Jameson between “destiny” and the “eternal present” (*Antinomies* 26). For Jameson, the tension between these two opposed temporal impulses lies at the heart of the phenomenon of realism, and Dickens’ emphasis on a similar opposition suggests (perhaps not surprisingly) that his work is a central instance of the realist enterprise. And, given the thoroughly bourgeois nature of this enterprise—Jameson also notes that “the realist mode is closely associated with the bourgeoisie and the coming into being of bourgeois daily life” (*Antinomies* 5)—Dickens’ central position as a realist writer further establishes the firmness within which his work is situated within bourgeois cultural production.

Seen slightly differently, the long “natural” cycles of time that Dickens refers to as “the great manufacturer” are really nothing more than history in the modern sense, itself an invention of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, Dickens’ relating of this historical time to natural processes rather than to social phenomena is itself a classic bourgeois ideological maneuver; bourgeois ideology frequently seeks to disguise its operations through appeals to the natural. Discussing Dickens’ opposition between these two different kinds of time in *Hard Times*, Rosemary Bodenheimer argues that, however limited Dickens might be as a radical critic of capitalism, one of the

strengths of the novel is its attempt to recover the realities of working-class experience through the individual narratives of characters such as Sissy Jupe and Stephen Blackpool, which she also figures are attempts by Dickens to recover history, the long temporal cycles of time, “the great manufacturer.” Bodenheimer here anticipates Jameson’s emphasis on the importance of history, as well as his insistence on narrative as “the central function or instance of the human mind” (*Political* 13). More importantly, Bodenheimer here in a sense considers Dickens a participant in what Jameson sees as a crucial part of any Marxist critical project. Jameson’s famed emphasis on the need to recover the “political unconscious” of the literary text is centrally informed by a project of historical recovery:

It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of the political unconscious finds its function and its necessity. (*Political* 20)

Narrative authenticity thus resides in understanding each individual as part of a larger historical process rather than as standing apart from it. It is here that Jameson parts ways with both Bodenheimer and Dickens. For Bodenheimer, Dickens’ project of narrative recovery is an anti-capitalist gesture; however, it is a purely individualist gesture, the authenticity of the narratives she describes deriving (for her) precisely from their personal, idiosyncratic nature, which makes them unique to the individuals whose stories they relate. But this emphasis on the unique nature of the personal narrative of each individual is an expression of bourgeois ideology in one of its purest forms, working to set each person apart from every other and especially working to establish characters such as Sissy and Stephen as unusual individuals who have little in common with the other members of their class, impeding the development of their class consciousness and crippling their ability to even imagine (much less participate in) any genuine class consciousness.

For Bodenheimer, Dickens through narrative aligns himself and his project as a novelist with time “the great manufacturer,” which she sees as an anti-bourgeois historical narrative—a narrative that holds that “the truths of historical experience ... are available only in narrative form” (190).

The statistical clock, on the other hand, works by fragmentation: it seems to break every second off from its successor, only to leave a heap of dead moments lying on the floor. As a metaphor for the violation of temporality that Dickens associates with the utilitarian-industrial society of Coketown, the clock disrupts continuity, development, narrative, and history, measuring experience in social cross sections and tabular statements. (189)

For Bodenheimer, the opposition between the fractured factory time of the statistical clock and the long, continuous arc of time “the great manufacturer” is essentially a version of the classic bourgeois opposition between the political and the personal that is designed precisely to prevent working-class solidarity and the concerted collective action that it would enable. For Jameson, it is crucial to understand that bourgeois ideology continually

reconfirms that structural, experiential, and conceptual gap between the public and the private, between the social and the psychological, or the political and the poetic, between history or society and the “individual,” which—the tendential law of social life under capitalism—maims our existence as individual subjects and paralyzes our thinking about time and change just as surely as it alienates us from our speech itself. (*Political* 20)

Further, if the production of the perception of a gap between public and private experience is thus a crucial project of bourgeois ideology, it is a project that Dickens endorses everywhere in his work, perhaps most notably in that classic moment in *Great Expectations* in which we learn that Wemmick, an ordinary clerk in the public world, has made his private home into a “castle” where he reigns supreme over his own domain, a realm of private experience that remains entirely separate from his public life: “When I go into the office, I leave the Castle behind me, and when I come into the Castle, I leave the office behind me” (195). Indeed, all of *Great*

Expectations thematizes this public-private split, as Pip's public success ultimately separates him from Joe Gargery and other sources of genuine personal connection, leaving him feeling sentimental about his former connections—but not sentimental enough to re-establish them at the risk of his public success.

Bodenheimer's evocation of the authentic personal narratives of characters such as Sissy and Stephen in *Hard Times* participates in a long critical tradition of celebrating Dickens' creation of vividly colorful characters, so individualized that they would seem to have virtually nothing in common with each other. Dorothy Van Ghent makes this point particularly well in her classic study *The English Novel: Form and Function*, where she argues that Dickens' individualized languages indicate “a vision of life that sees human separateness as the ordinary condition” (127). She also notes Joe Gargery's style of reading (looking for evidence of his own name amid an otherwise virtually indecipherable stew of letters) as a key marker of this separateness, though this seemingly eccentric style of reading in some ways allegorizes the reading of novels in general, the novel being the first major genre to have been developed for reading by individual readers sitting alone and separate from others. As such, it also allegorizes the peculiarly bourgeois nature, for Dickens, of the realm of written discourse in general.

For Franco Moretti, this aspect of Dickens' language marks a breakdown of Bakhtinian dialogue: different languages are present, but they interact through miscommunication, rather than communication. Dickens' famously eccentric characters, for Moretti, are so different from one another that they essentially speak different languages. But while such linguistic diversity is consistently figured by Bakhtin as a rich source of dialogism in the novel, Moretti argues that the languages of Dickens' characters are so different that genuine dialogue becomes impossible. In a sense, then, for Moretti “heteroglossia and dialogue [. . .] are inversely proportional: if people

don't speak the same language, after all, how is dialogue ever going to be possible?" (*Way* 194). How, in short, will the kind of solidarity that enables class consciousness and mass collective political action ever take place?

Such breakdowns in communication lie, of course, at the very heart of the project of bourgeois individualism, as do Dickens' famously eccentric and colorful characters, so distinct from one another as to be vividly memorable to readers but indecipherable to each other. Citing Dickens' Micawber as a key example, Moretti goes on to note that "the great English comic characters are always terribly deaf and impressively talkative" (195). They ramble on endlessly, but are essentially speaking soliloquys: no one really listens to them, and they, in turn, listen to no one.

Hard Times includes no comically grotesque eccentrics of the order of Micawber, but it certainly includes its share of bad listeners, the most notable of whom is Bounderby, who has such a tendency to expound that it is virtually impossible for anyone to tell him anything. In another of the book's seemingly simple polar oppositions, Bounderby is the figure of the rich capitalist who is opposed by that of his poor employee, Blackpool. Bounderby is an unscrupulous knave, as his name indicates. He is also a banker, a calculating moneygrubber who is constantly anxious, thinking that all the laborers of Coketown envy him and want to be in his position. Thus he repeatedly tells the story of how he worked hard to become a self-made man and how he grew up basically in the alleys, abandoned by his mother and abused by his drunken grandmother, from whom he eventually managed to escape. To Bounderby's personal narrative the narrator of the story satirically adds, "I entertain the weak idea that the English people are as hard-worked as any people upon whom the sun shines" (67), insinuating thereby that Bounderby is also a liar. Bounderby sees himself alone in a class higher than anybody else; even against all

the other bourgeoisie, as “Josiah Bounderby of Coketown,” depending on none of the advantages inherent in social position and literalizing the concept of the self-made man. We learn eventually, however, that Bounderby’s financial progress was shaped by a loving, nurturing mother and a kind master who helped him ascend gradually into wealth. But it is of course the capitalist system itself that most powerfully enabled Bounderby’s rise. Thus, even as Dickens criticizes Bounderby as an individual capitalist, he heaps praise upon the opportunities offered by the capitalist system—as long as those opportunities are pursued in the proper, law-abiding way.

Bounderby is structurally opposed in the text not only by Blackpool, but also by Sissy, who is the abandoned daughter of a poor traveling circus clown who had come through Coketown. In Gradgrind’s classroom she is referred to as Girl Number 20. By stripping the students of their human subjectivity and identifying them as numbers, the classroom mechanizes the children and dehumanizes them. In Gradgrind School imagination is forbidden—not every kind of imagination, only the kind of imagination that is clearly linked to humanity. In one incident, Mr. M’choakumchild, a teacher in Gradgrind School, by whose name Dickens purposes to bring to the reader’s mind the image of a man choking a child, tries to teach Sissy statistics without reference to human emotions. He tries to convince her that a city of a million inhabitants in which only twenty-five starve to death is prosperous. Sissy responds that the deaths must be just as hard on the families of the twenty-five when the survival rate is high as it is when it is low. Her answer shows that unlike Louisa, who is well trained in statistics and facts, Sissy is in touch with her emotions and humanity; she cannot think statistically when the matter concerns people’s lives. Sissy is forced to move in with the Gradgrinds, a utilitarian bourgeois family, but she remains faithful to the circus she came from, despite all the effort made by Mr. Gradgrind to erase her personal history and emotional connection to her past: “From this time you begin your

history” (53). Mr. Gradgrind remarks that Sissy’s upbringing as a poor child has prevented her from progressing to their level. Sissy, for her part, fails to conform to the Gradgrind utilitarian system and teaches Mr. Gradgrind that it is impossible to make economic progress at the expense of humanity. Sissy represents successful defiance of the utilitarian system that would reduce her to a numerical unit. She achieves individuality, which keeps her in check within the bourgeois system: “Sissy defines statistics as ‘stutterings’—fragments of speech—and transforms the numbers into narratives of feeling in individual lives” (Bodenheimer 194). Dickens’ depiction of the unchanged nature of Sissy shows her ability to find happiness. Because things cannot get better than they are, the capitalist system offers “a balance of continuity and change” (200) and is able “to sweeten lives ruled by facts” (191).

By the end of the story, Sissy is the happiest of the characters because she has escaped the teaching of utilitarianism. However, Mr. Gradgrind’s own children, Tom and Louisa, who grow up in their father’s system, are depicted as victims of the utilitarian system. They are forbidden to be creative or imaginative, or even to have feelings. Mr. Gradgrind is basically trying to turn his children into human robots, and their awful fates stand as proof of the drastic failure of the utilitarian system.

As Dickens narrates Blackpool’s story, he observes that Stephen is a laborer from the working class, though he is less idiosyncratic than the classic Dickens character, but instead stands in as a generalized figure of the worker. Apparently, for Dickens, different bourgeois individuals are genuinely different, but different workers are pretty much interchangeable. Stephen is a decent man, one of the best hands in Bounderby’s factory, yet Bounderby regards him as a mere member of “a race who would have found more favor with some people, if

providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs” (68).

The way in which the workers are described by the bourgeois factory owner as “hands” shows how they are reduced to the status of machines, viewed “as mere pieces of manufacturing machinery” (Booker, *Practical* 74), unacknowledged as full human beings with the attributes of “laborers.” Stephen is “a good power-loom weaver, and man of perfect integrity” (69). However, his being described as a “hand” shows that, according to the bourgeoisie, he and the other laborers are not fully human beings. Although he is relatively young, he is described as looking older than his age, as he has had a very hard life, and the nature of the work he had to do made his apparent physical age surpass his actual age. “Stephen came out of the hot mill into the damp wind and cold wet streets, haggard and worn” (74). Thus, his eventual accidental death only speeds up a process that is already well underway. Working in nineteenth-century English mines and factories was quite often literally fatal. Engels describes the fate of the mining proletariat: “In the whole British Empire there is no occupation in which a man may meet his end in so many diverse ways as in this one” (11).

Blackpool leads a sad life, making him a key focus of the sentimentality of the book. Married too young to a woman who has turned into an insane alcoholic, he falls in love with a young woman named Rachel. He then decides to pay his employer Bounderby a visit to see if Bounderby can help him find a way out of his suffocating marriage. Upon meeting with Stephen, the greedy Bounderby sarcastically says, “You don’t expect to be set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on a turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon, as many of ’em do!” (75). The working man “is made to feel at every moment that the bourgeoisie treats him as chattel, as its property” (Engels 120).

After telling Bounderby his story about his drunkard wife and inquiring if there is a law that allows for divorce, Stephen is scolded by Bounderby: “There is such a law, but it’s not for you at all. It costs a mint of money” (79). Stephen responds that such unfairness in the country’s institution is “a muddle” (79), which makes Bounderby furious: “‘Pooh, pooh! Don’t you talk nonsense, my good fellow,’ said Mr. Bounderby, ‘about things you don’t understand; and don’t call the institutions of your country a muddle, or you’ll get yourself into a real muddle’” (79–80). There is no doubt that Bounderby would defend the institutional laws: “The institutions of your country are not your piece-work, and the only thing you have got to do, is, to mind your piece-work” (80). Bounderby, in short, does not recognize “the right of the working men to a life worthy of a human being, an independent activity, and opinions of his own” (Engels 31).

The conversation between the two is conducted in a way that shows that Stephen needs to be guided and that it is Bounderby’s job to govern the working class. The question “How would you set this muddle to rights?” (79) implies that Bounderby feels that Blackpool himself can do nothing to change the situation. This suggests that Dickens views the worker as needing to be governed by a leader and that it is the responsibility of the employer to attend to the human needs of their workers. Indeed, Blackpool himself sees no way out of the mess:

Deed we are in a muddle, sir. Look round town—so rich as ’tis—and see the numbers o’ people as has been broughten into bein heer, fur to weave, an to card, an to piece out a livin’, aw the same one way, somehows, twixt their cradles and their graves. Look how we live, and wheer we live, an in what numbers, an by what chances, and wi’ what sameness; and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to ony dis’ant object—ceptin awlus, Death. Look how you considers of us, and writes of us, and talks of us, and goes up wi’ yor deputations to Secretaries o’ State ’bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had’n no reason in us sin ever we were born. Look how this ha grownen an grownen, sir, bigger an bigger, broader an broader, harder an harder, fro year to year, fro generation unto generation. Who can look on ’t, sir, and fairly tell a man ’tis not a muddle? (153)

The intimate story of Stephen's romance with Rachel and his personal history are the only places in which the narrator fills in details, as he does with Stephen's walk in the rain to avoid going back home to confront his wife. He is given the freedom to think and reflect elaborately on the personal details of his life because they do not bear on class politics, but focus on purely personal matters. The liberty to speak about his personal history is only one way of attacking the philosophical approaches of utilitarianism. Dickens is trying to find a more reliable and a more coherent theory of economics because utilitarianism to him is inhumane, but he ends up replacing utilitarianism with something that can only accommodate and sustain the bourgeois class interest. Thus, Dickens' satire and attack on utilitarianism does not go against bourgeois interests; he is skeptical only of its results of "Statistic Inquiry, with its limited means, with its short vision" (Carlyle 126).

The moment Blackpool's thoughts begin to threaten class politics, he "sits in paralyzed fascination" (Bodenheimer 196). Stephen stumbles on words and is unable to convey his request to Bounderby because bourgeois ideology "alienates us from speech itself" (Jameson 20). Blackpool is unable to change the reality of his situation because "individual perception in a capitalist society is limited by class consciousness, which enables members of a certain class to understand the world only in a way allowed by their class position" (Booker, *Practical* 74).

Blackpool's refusal to be part of the workers' union accentuates Dickens' skepticism toward trade unionism in general, which grows out of the anxiety that Dickens seems to feel whenever he attempts to think in terms of class, rather than individual characters. For Bodenheimer, his "strident depiction of the union exactly reduplicates that anxiety: he sees it as an evil mobilization of class and gives it only one action: its attack on the idiosyncratic position of Stephen Blackpool" (192). Thus, his depiction of Blackpool ultimately focuses on the

subjectivity of the character rather than that character's environment or on anything else he shares with other workers. By shedding light on Stephen's divorce problem and his love for Rachel, a woman who works with him in the same factory, Dickens highlights his human subjectivity, making him more than a number among the other "hands." Through his characterization as a hardworking man who has emotions of love, we are able to find a face for Stephen among the crowd of "hands." Stephen is an individual and most importantly a human being. Also by focusing on Stephen's marriage and love story, rather than on his working conditions—as Elizabeth Gaskell does with John Barton, where all the dynamics revolve around working-class working conditions—Dickens intends to shift the focus away from the utilitarian concept of facts, which has no regard for human emotions, and which, like bourgeois ideology in general, annihilates individualism even as it claims to elevate it. At the same time, Dickens, by focusing on Stephen's personal life, enacts this exact same bourgeois ideology, with the same negative consequences: "The bourgeoisie endowed the individual with an unprecedented importance, but at the same time that same individuality was annihilated by economic conditions to which it was subjected, by their reification created by commodity production" (Lukács, *History* 65).

Although Blackpool dies, he dies while trying to find a job somewhere else so that he can be with Rachel, which means that he has never lost hope. The criticism of Bounderby and treatment of him in a negative light provides an assurance to Dickens' audience that the rich and powerful do not entirely dominate English society, leaving room for individuals to prosper through their own efforts, as long as those efforts are carried out in the proper way and within the system. Bounderby, in fact, is ultimately killed during a melee in the Coketown streets, providing another sign that his power is limited, while warning his fellow bourgeoisie that the union's

strikes and related violence (which was, in reality, minimal) will bring the capitalists down if they do not treat laborers as human beings. Bounderby, in short, is vulnerable to the same sorts of forces that have killed Stephen Blackpool. Death is a natural thing—time is “the great manufacturer” that exists in those long cycles; the narrative of any individual human life will end in death.

Ultimately, Louisa’s failed marriage makes her father change his utilitarian views. Gradgrind’s change of heart symbolizes a valid possibility that the bourgeoisie might mend their views. The way that Sissy ends up leading a good, reasonable life by getting married and having children suggests that with all the brutality, Dickens still draws an optimistic picture; he applies social reform through mending the relationship between the working class and the bourgeoisie. However, “the nature of the changes recorded in these stories is so private that it hardly seems to bear on the question of social change. ... Reconciliation between a character and its history are the ‘romances’ of the novel, its only offers of solutions” (Bodenheimer 205–6).

Elizabeth Gaskell would seem to focus more clearly on the “question of social change” in novels such as *Mary Barton*. Like Dickens, she draws her material from the emergent city of the nineteenth century, taking her energy from the possibilities (both positive and negative) brought forth by urbanization and by capitalist modernization in general. Indeed, Raymond Williams concludes that Gaskell is the only nineteenth-century English novelist who rivals Dickens as a chronicler of “the intricacies and paradoxes of city experience” (*Country* 219). Indeed, the writing of both artists emanates from their experiences as city dwellers, but they dwell in very different cities. As Williams notes, despite the counter-example of *Hard Times*, Dickens is primarily a novelist of London, a city with a complex, cosmopolitan history with so much diversity and so many conflicts that the opposition between classes is easily obscured, even as it

remains the crucial driving force of the city's history—and of all history. Gaskell's Manchester, on the other hand, is (like Dickens' Coketown) is a very different proposition. A product almost entirely of capitalist modernity, Manchester is dominated by industry and by the social relations this entails, stripped of the richness of London's long, complex history, but also informed by an economic and social stratification that is consequently much more straightforward and clear.

When Dickens gets outside of London, he begins to lose energy. His Coketown is a mean and baleful and impoverished place, largely because of its contrast with London. Gaskell's Manchester, on the other hand, is somewhat livelier, enriched by the possibilities of a genuine working-class consciousness and the working-class culture it enables. For Williams, Gaskell's *Mary Barton* “enacts at a very deep if confused level the full consequences of a class struggle. It is a story less of the poor and the outcast than of starving working men and their families who are beginning to realize their common condition and to unite to amend it” (*Country* 219). This observation immediately casts Gaskell as a novelist potentially far more radical than Dickens, even apart from any implications that might be associated with her gender, and it is certainly the case that it would be almost impossible to imagine Dickens detailing (especially in a vaguely sympathetic way) trade union activity anywhere in his work the way Gaskell does in *Mary Barton*. One would also be hard-pressed to find anywhere in Dickens a figure who comes as close to the notion of the Gramscian organic working-class intellectual as the one embodied in Gaskell's John Barton.³

It is for such reasons that Williams declares Gaskell's achievement to be “profoundly impressive” and “a true mark of radical change,” even if she pulls back (under pressure from her publishers, according to Williams) from endorsing violent collective action to modify the oppressive conditions that she so effectively documents in her work. Nevertheless, *Mary Barton*,

Gaskell's first novel (published—anonously—when she was still in her late thirties) is her most radical work and the one that comes closest to aligning itself with the cause of poor workers against the exploitative practices of their rich bosses. For example, *North and South* (1855), Gaskell's second most extensive exploration of class conflict, is considerably more balanced, trying to treat the points of view of the two classes as equally valid in an attempt to overcome misunderstandings between them. Moreover, *North and South* is perhaps the most clear of all of Gaskell's writings in its advocacy of communication as a path to understanding between classes. Thus, Moretti notes that words such as "influence" and "intercourse" seem to be the key operators in this novel, which places so much emphasis on mutual understanding (possibly even love) between the classes (*Bourgeois* 121–23).

Terry Eagleton sees the difference between *Mary Barton* and *North and South* as a particularly clear marker of a historical transition in English trade unionism in which the unions shift from being loci of resistance to bourgeois rule to being key mechanism for teaching workers willingly to accept bourgeois hegemony (*Criticism* 111n.27). Indeed, *North and South* appeared at the very end of the cycle of "industrial novels" that can be seen as beginning with Harriet Martineau's *A Manchester Strike* in 1832. It appeared, in fact, close to the same moment in this cycle as *Hard Times*, which might explain the fact that it is much closer in its overall ideological inclination to *Hard Times* than is *Mary Barton*.⁴

On the other hand, a closer look at *Mary Barton* shows that, even there, Gaskell has no stomach for revolution and already adopts the position that class conflict can best be mediated, not by violence, but simply by communication and mutual understanding between the members of the two main classes that constituted her Victorian society, leading to a process of negotiation that might correct certain specific extreme abuses but that will leave the fundamental structure of

the capitalist system intact. *Mary Barton* is, first and foremost, a gesture of reconciliation between the rich and the poor that leaves the rich rich and leaves the poor poor. The author warns against miscommunication between the bourgeoisie and the working class: unless the two antagonistic classes begin to communicate and cooperate, and the bourgeoisie begin to acknowledge the existence and humanity of the workers, the ramifications will be everything from disruptive protest to violent crime. It is this violence, including its ultimate form, revolution, that Gaskell seeks to prevent.

As with *Hard Times*, *Mary Barton* is structured according to a series of dichotomies. Indeed, these dichotomies (of which the opposition between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is the prototype and central instance) are much more central to the structure of Gaskell's novel than of Dickens', which puts so much emphasis on the unchanging and monotonous grimness of Coketown. *Mary Barton*, on the other hand, emphasizes dichotomies from the very beginning, opening with a contrast between capitalist meanness and the richness of nature. In the book's first pages, John Barton's and George Wilson's families are walking from the Green Hay Fields, a rural area on the outskirts of Manchester—described as very beautiful and calm, a subtle image of wholesomeness. However, the setting shifts gradually, along with their walk, to the factory-mill town of Manchester, where the working-class families work and live, and finally to the Bartons' miserable dwelling. Gaskell fits this wholesome image of the countryside in with John's lament to George about the disparity between the rich and the poor and the former's indifference to the latter's deplorable working and living conditions. John, a trade union activist displays a clear class consciousness when he contrasts the lots of the rich and the poor:

The rich know nothing of the trials of the poor; I say, if they don't know, they ought to know. We're their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows, and yet we are to live as separate as if we

were in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus, with a great gulf betwixt us. (11)

The gulf mentioned here by Barton is central to the entire novel, just as Barton himself is the book's central character, despite the fact that it takes its title from the name of his beautiful daughter. However, while the book does detail Barton's efforts at mobilizing workers to demand better conditions, it also depicts those efforts as almost entirely unsuccessful. Ostensibly, Barton's failure is largely a failure of communication—both with other workers and (perhaps more importantly) with their capitalist bosses. However, a closer look at the text reveals that Barton's efforts to initiate collective action must fail almost by definition due to the bourgeois ideology that drives the text. For one thing, Gaskell is simply unwilling to endorse the kind of violent action that might lead to genuine systemic change. For another, *Mary Barton* is largely constructed as the story of John Barton's *personal* hardships, indeed tragedy, rather than as a story of working-class action or (as the novel's collective-sounding subtitle suggests) a "Tale of Manchester Life." In short, the novel, like the nineteenth-century realist novel in general, is thoroughly informed by an individualist ideology that makes it virtually impossible for the narrative to embody anything approaching a successful collective action.⁵

Mary Barton is not so much a story of the struggle of working-class people to carve out a collective identity and to conduct effective class action as the story of the transformation of John Barton from a decent, loving person from the working class into an angry criminal, driven to a mindless violence that achieves nothing other than Barton's own destruction through guilt. Though he initially works via the trade union movement to try to help improve the condition of workers, he is relatively content with the little that he has. Then personal tragedy strikes via the death of his son Tom and his wife (also named Mary Barton), leaving him to raise his daughter Mary on his own. There are certainly suggestions in the book that such deaths are common for

working-class families due to the dismal conditions in which they live and work. But the emphasis is on John's personal experience, clearly driven by the individualist assumption that readers will respond more strongly to personal tragedy than to collective injustice.

Williams has argued that *Mary Barton* as a whole is informed by an opposition between the public concerns of John Barton and the private concerns of his daughter Mary. Moreover, Williams sees the trajectory of the novel's narrative as involving a gradual shift from a focus on John's public concerns to Mary's private ones, as a shift in genre from the social novel to the conventional Victorian novel of sentiment. (*Culture and Society* 89). It thus, for Williams, makes sense that the title of the novel was changed from the original *John Barton* to the final *Mary Barton*, despite the fact that John is the central character through most of the narrative. One might farther, however, and argue that the private concerns represented by Mary are in fact always dominant, even when John remains the clear protagonist.

Among other things, this personal, individualist emphasis is reinforced by the depiction of Barton as an alienated individual, unable to relate to other workers because of his greater insight and intelligence, which ultimately separate him from them rather than making him an effective leader. Antonio Gramsci has emphasized that, while intellectuals form an important element of the exercise of bourgeois hegemony, functioning as the "deputies" of the ruling bourgeoisie in securing the voluntary consent of the masses to be ruled (12). To combat this intellectual power, Gramsci envisions intellectuals who arise from the midst of the working-class and remain organically connected to it, providing insight and knowledge that help the workers to overcome the intellectual dominance of the bourgeoisie.

The thoughtful Barton would seem a possible candidate to play the role of organic intellectual. Unfortunately, he provides little in the way of the kind of intellectual leadership that

Gramsci envisions. In particular, Barton largely loses his organic connection to the working class precisely because of his greater intelligence and insight, which actually make it quite difficult for him to communicate with “ordinary” workers, who are consistently depicted in *Mary Barton* as inarticulate and as lacking the intellectual skills necessary to understand Barton’s arguments.

The uneducated and relatively inarticulate Barton, of course, is an intellectual only in the broadest sense. Gaskell actually presents a more obvious candidate for this role in the person of the artisan naturalist Job Legh, who functions as a voice of reason and scientific rationality and as evidence that working-class individuals are, in fact, capable of rational thought. Legh, however, does little to provide leadership to the working class other than to try to help them to better understand the point of view of their bosses, thus furthering communication between the classes. In addition, like the novel itself, Legh addresses much of his discourse to capitalists like Carson, in an effort to help them better understand the condition of their workers.⁶

As a result, far from providing an example of the way in which the working class can produce its own intellectuals, who can then provide leadership for their class, the depiction of Barton (and, for that matter, Legh) suggests that he is something of a freak among his fellow workers, with whom he can establish little connection because of his higher level of intellectual development. Far from remaining organically connected to his fellow workers, and thus illustrating Gramsci’s concept of the organic intellectual, Barton is in fact a forerunner of the alienated intellectual who would fully emerge in English literature with the later work of writers such as George Gissing (as with Godwin Peake from the 1892 novel *Born in Exile*) and Thomas Hardy (as with Jude Fawley), who detailed intelligent working-class characters removed from their class roots by intellectual aspirations, then left stranded without a class connection of any kind.

Such characters tend to come to tragic ends somewhat along the lines of the one experienced by Barton, who from this point of view can be seen as the forerunner of a whole new character type. The sad fate typically suffered by this declassed, alienated intellectual certainly serves as a warning that promises of upward mobility for the most talented and hard-working citizens of modern capitalism are not to be trusted, but they hardly provide, at least not automatically, anything in the way of a radical alternative to the capitalist system. At the same time, while Barton can be seen as a forerunner of later aspiring intellectuals such as Peake and Fawley, he does not in fact exhibit the key trait that Jameson associates with the *déclassement* of such alienated intellectuals: “that form of class treason which is fascination with or aspiration to the status of those on the other side of the class line” (*Political* 195).

Barton does not aspire to rise above the working class; he simply wishes to receive more respect and better treatment as a working-class individual. In fact, he harshly rebukes his daughter for her dreams of living in bourgeois luxury. He does, however, share with his successors in English literature a powerful and very modern sense of alienation, a sense that the contrasts informing his class-divided society create such sharp gaps in individual experience that it is impossible for one person truly to know another. At one point, he walks along a busy street and we are told by a narrator whose voice is clearly impacted by Barton’s thoughts (displaying the bourgeois stylistic flourish known as indirect free style long before Flaubert, who made the technique famous),

But he could not, you cannot, read the lot of those who daily pass you by in the street. How do you know the wild romances of their lives; the trials, the temptations they are even now enduring, resisting, sinking under? ... Errands of mercy—errands of sin—did you ever think where all the thousands of people you daily meet are bound? (63)

It is telling that the narrator here emphasizes the differences that separate the individuals on this busy street, as opposed, for example, to Engels' description of these same streets, which notes (somewhat in the same way as Gaskell's narrator) that there is "something repulsive" in the way individuals mill about on the streets of Manchester in a chaotic turmoil that makes any real connection with one's fellows impossible. For Engels, however, what makes this situation unfortunate is the fact that it obscures what all of these very different individuals have in common. He thus asks, "Are they not all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy?" (28).

This emphasis on what the strangers who encounter one another on the streets of Manchester have in common sets Engels sharply apart from Gaskell, who emphasizes only their differences from one another, though of course this particular way of thinking might better be associated with John Barton than with Gaskell herself. Still, Barton's alienation is a natural consequence of industrial capitalism. However, in *Mary Barton* his loneliness and alienation arise primarily from personal family tragedy. Whatever trouble he might have communicating his ideas to other workers (and however frustrated he might become with the ignorance of the rich concerning the conditions in which poor workers live), John begins the novel as a loving husband to his pregnant wife, devoted to his family and its future. At the simple tea party depicted in the novel he is warm and generous with his neighbors, although he has little to share with them because of his own poverty.

This kind-hearted soul begins to develop into an angry man who makes his decisions based on hunger and desperation only after a series of personal tragedies that include the death of his infant son Tom from scarlet fever and the death of his wife during labor. These deaths are directly related to the dismal conditions in which the Bartons live, and they lead John to grow

more embittered toward the upper class, who are indifferent to the working class's plight. Nevertheless, the experience of losing his son and his wife is a very personal one, and it is clear that Barton's reaction to the deaths arises more from personal anguish than from class-based outrage. Among other things, Barton's inability to protect his wife and son is a sort of personal affront that poses a threat to his own masculinity and sense of power. Indeed, as Lisa Surridge notes, "there is much to suggest that the novel is as much concerned with masculinity as it is with industrialization and class strife" (331).

Later, a fire at Carson's mill, where Barton is employed, causes most hands to lose their jobs, including Barton. Of course, these poor workers are already barely surviving and can afford to lose nothing; their suffering is intense and directly related to their class position. The wealthy owner, John Carson, is in a position to weather losses, but he (of course) loses nothing: his mill is insured, and he ends up using the insurance settlement to upgrade his plant with advanced machines that help him to generate even bigger profits than he had before the fire. The class-based injustice of this situation is made quite clear in the novel. However, the emphasis in the narrative is on the personal suffering of individual workers such as Ben Davenport, who pathetically sickens and dies, despite the efforts of Barton and George Wilson to save him.

George asks John to help get food and medicine for Davenport, whose impoverished condition has led him to fall gravely sick with typhoid fever. John takes his little dinner and accompanies George to the Davenports' dwelling. The condition of the room is described as not even fit for a pig to live in: "They began to penetrate the thick darkness of the place, and to see three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet brick floor through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up; the fireplace was empty and black" (60).

Wilson goes to Carson to seek an infirmary order so that Davenport can receive medical treatment. Gaskell shows the lack of communication when it turns out that Carson does not even know who Davenport is, although Davenport has been working for Carson for three years. This shows how far removed the employer is from the employee: “I don’t pretend to know the names of the men I employ” (70). Gaskell, however, does not depict Carson as the evil and heartless capitalist. Instead, he is simply unaware. Once Davenport, the employee whose name he did not even know, is individualized to him, Carson sympathizes with his case, which affects him strongly enough that he changes his attitude and decides to devote his energy to improving conditions and thus ameliorating the social unrest, and things between the classes begin to improve.⁷

While Wilson visits Carson, Barton goes to the druggist in town to buy medicine. While standing outside the well-lit apothecary shop, he senses the cheer inside it and becomes furious, launching into a highly class-based meditation on the injustices of the system around him. He tells George how money between the lower-class and the rich people is not divided evenly: although the workers do all the work, “They’n gotten capital an’ we’n gotten none. I say, our labour’s our capital, and we ought to draw interest on that. They get interest on their capital somehow a’ this time, while ourn is lying idle, else how could they all live as they do?” (66). It does not make any sense to John how they who work more and produce more for society are the ones who suffer under such conditions. He observes the rich factory owners and how they are distant from the poor working class, who have trouble feeding their families: “Han they never seen a child o’ their’n die for want o’ food?” (66).

Such appeals to visions of dying children are among the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of sentimental literature, and this vision (together with the entire description of the illness

of Davenport, who touchingly dies while Barton and Wilson are on their missions to retrieve help for him) is part of a narrative strand running through *Mary Barton* that can only be described as melodramatic. Indeed, as Alison Moulds notes, many aspects of *Mary Barton*, especially the scenes from the trial of Jem Wilson for the murder of Harry Carson, are presented in a melodramatic mode. This turn to melodrama, which would become more and more common in Victorian culture in the coming decades, again places Gaskell among the trend-setters of the culture of her time. Of course, it should come as no surprise that Gaskell would turn to melodrama even in her social novels, given that so much of her writing involved Gothic ghost stories that were themselves highly melodramatic in their orientation. Still, it is worth noting that melodrama is in many ways a quintessential bourgeois form that places its emphasis on individual pathos at the expense of any genuine social analysis, depending for its effect on provoking an emotional reaction in audiences of precisely the kind that sophisticated political writers such as Bertolt Brecht have seen as inimical to any genuine social critique in literature.

At this point in the novel there are two dead people in Barton's family, while the unemployed Barton remains responsible for his young daughter. Driven to desperation, he contemplates stealing because he has no income and cannot buy food on store credit. Nevertheless, he decides, at the last moment, not to turn to theft to feed himself and young Mary. He feels contempt for himself at having failed to take action, but he still does not resort to the radical disruption of the social order that a turn to crime would represent. Instead, he concludes that the best course of action is an *appeal* to authority, rather than a violent action against it. He still believes that Parliament has taken no action to alleviate the suffering of the working class because its members are probably ignorant of the working-class conditions in cities like

Manchester, so he decides to channel his frustration by being more involved in trade union activism and Chartism.

John does not accept charity. He wants to work, and he believes working is a right that has been taken away by the capitalist system and its bourgeois masters. He considers himself a full-functioning human being who will not be forced to accept charity or live under their forced circumstances. Accepting charity to John means recognizing the right of the bourgeois to exploit him and leave him to starve whenever they want. He tells his daughter, “I don’t want money, Child! D—n their charity and their money! I want work, and it is my right. I want work” (115).

John’s trip to London and the unsuccessful attempt by the Chartists to get Parliament to hear their demands is their last hope of using an appeal to morality to voice their conditions. This trip strips away their last grain of remaining faith in religion and even in humanity. Failing repeatedly to find the justice he seeks (in Chartism, in communism, and in various other forms of political action), Barton eventually turns to drugs to numb his hopelessness and depression. The rich usually consider the use of drugs by the lower class as an escape from hard work and earning a living. However, John tries everything he can to find work, to get his voice heard through the trade union, and to be a productive person. His drug use is not an escape from work, but an escape from conditions that make it *impossible* for him to work. The narrator rationalizes how such behavior develops, again with a highly sentimental, melodramatic appeal:

But before you blame too harshly this use, or rather abuse, try a hopeless life, with daily cravings of the body for food. Try, not alone being without hope yourself, but seeing all around you reduced to the same despair, arising from the same circumstances; all around you telling (though they use no words or language), by their looks and feeble actions, that they are suffering and sinking under the pressure of want. Would you not be glad to forget life, and its burdens? And opium gives forgetfulness for a time. (169)

Eventually, Barton is pushed to his limit. When a large foreign order promises new business for the Manchester mills, there is hope of increased prosperity for the towns and better conditions to the working people. But capitalism is about profit, not people, and so many industrialists bid for the jobs that the winning bid is low and the winners end up paying their workers extremely low wages. In response, the workers organize a strike, and Harry Carson convinces the mill owners to reject the demands of the strikers and to bring in workers from outside Manchester who are willing to work for any offered price. This act will lead John Barton to murder the younger Carson, though it is in fact an act very much in line with the typical behavior of members of the Carsons' class: "The capitalists seize everything for themselves, while to the weak many, the poor, scarcely a bare existence remains" (Engels 107). Accordingly, there are no clear rights for the working man under capitalism. He is not treated as a slave; he is even less. The working man is but a commodity with a value and price that rises and falls according to the market force. If he becomes of no economic use to the bourgeois, he is treated as nonexistent.

The young Engels already recognized this situation, noting that the burdens in society fall upon the working class, while all the benefits go to their rich bosses:

The poor man is cast into a whirlpool, he must struggle through as well as he can. If he is so happy to find work, i.e., if the bourgeoisie does him any favor to enrich itself by means of him, wages await him which scarcely suffice to keep body and soul together. (Engels 3)

Gaskell seems to know all this as well, as does John Barton. However, his response at this point is a purely individual one of turning to crime, attempting to work within the law having garnered no positive results. He resolves to murder Harry Carson, hoping that this act of violence will somehow draw attention to the plight of the workers. Gaskell, of course, treats this turn as a loss and as a surrender of the possibility of productive communication between the classes. She thus

condemns Barton's turn to violence as a tragic error that will bring about his doom; she insists, through her narrator, that any turn to violence is similarly mistaken:

They forgot that the strike was in this instance the consequence of want and need, suffered unjustly, as the endurers believed; for, however insane, and without ground of reason, such was their belief, and such was the cause of their violence. It is a great truth that you cannot extinguish violence by violence. (181)

This instance reveals the author's awareness of the social upheavals in the world around her; however, she does not condone violence or (especially) revolution committed by the lower class. She is in fact horrified by such violence, and in this was very much of her time. The weight of the specter of the French Revolution weighed down on the shoulders of the Victorian upper classes like a nightmare. Noting that this fear was out of all proportion to the small amount of actual violence that was actually carried out on the part of the English working class during this period, Daniel Cottom sees the discussion of "union and mob violence" in *Mary Barton* as an "apparent exaggeration." On the other hand, he goes on to argue that this representation was a reaction not to the historical reality of such violence (which was almost non-existent), but to the discourse about this violence (which was ubiquitous) (41).

Gaskell's antidote to this imaginary violence was, of course, sympathy and sentimentality, and in this she was again very much of her time.⁸ Gaskell is sympathetic to the suffering endured by all parties. Mrs. Carson's reaction to her son's murder is the same as Jane Wilson's reaction to the death of the baby twins from typhoid fever. However, when the Wilson babies die, no one in the world hears their pain. Those babies were killed like Harry Carson, murdered as much as he. They did not die a natural death; they died because they were victims of social disorder. They were placed under vile conditions that no human being can live in, and they were tortured and weakened until they died. "Society in England has committed social murder

against the working-class as it has placed the workers under conditions in which they can neither retain health nor live long” (Engels 7).

In the end, *Mary Barton* reveals an agenda more tolerant with the bourgeois, trying to reform the situation while preserving class privilege. Harry’s murder does not develop into a social revolution, and it only represents the warning that miscommunication and misunderstanding between classes can have dire consequences. Depicting the plight of the poor for the bourgeoisie to see is not a call for a revolution; it serves only as a warning for the bourgeoisie to moderate class distinction. It legitimizes class position, and it directs criticism to the upper class only because they are not sufficiently involved with the conditions of the working class. Through appeals to sentiment, Gaskell seeks to promote mutual sympathy between the classes that might lead to mutual understanding. Hearing Mr. Carson speak of the emotions he felt upon the loss of his son, John Barton for the first time feels sympathy for a member of the upper class, although he previously felt nothing but contempt for them. Carson bemoans the loss of his son in the most sentimental terms possible:

Have I had no inward suffering to blanch these hairs? Have not I toiled and struggled even to these years with hopes in my heart that all centred in my boy? I did not speak of them, but were they not there? I seemed hard and cold; and so I might be to others, but not to him!—Who shall ever imagine the love I bore to him? Even he never dreamed how my heart leapt up at the sound of his footstep, and how precious he was to his poor old father. And he is gone —killed—out of the hearing of all loving words—out of my sight for ever. He was my sunshine, and now it is night! Oh, my God! comfort me, comfort me!" cried the old man aloud. (365–66)

Through his response to this sentimental outcry, John shows his realization that upper-class people are not inherently evil or enemies; he realizes that, in murdering Harry Carson, he has not killed an enemy but a family’s son and brother, a human being like himself or his own dead son:

The mourner before him was no longer the employer; a being of another race, eternally placed in antagonistic attitude; going through the world glittering like gold, with a stony heart within, which knew no sorrow but through the accidents of Trade; no longer the enemy, the oppressor, but a very poor and desolate old man. (366)

John, for his own part, confesses to the elder Carson that he killed Harry and that he had given up on the Bible's teachings and had started to feel that since the upper class did not abide by Christianity, he had no obligation to do so. Thus religion (though of the moderate sort that one would expect from Gaskell, the wife of a Unitarian minister and a Unitarian herself) also enters the equation: "At last I gave it up in despair, trying to make folks' actions square wi' th' Bible; and I thought I'd no longer labour at following th' Bible mysel. I've said all this afore, maybe. But from that time I've dropped down, down—down" (371).

Carlyle warned that if the poor live in sufficiently hellish conditions, they become much more fearful of the hell of poverty than of the hell after life, rendering religion less effective as a tool of social control (35). Gaskell in the end seeks to restore religion by depicting it as a key means of communication between the classes, ignoring the obvious fact that Christianity, with its emphasis on the afterlife and on acceptance of suffering in this life, inherently works to the advantage of the ruling class. She once again seeks to gain sympathy for Carson by having him respond to Barton's confession with Christian charity, forgiving Barton, who then melodramatically dies in Carson's arms.

Mary Barton as a whole does not condemn the class structure of mid-nineteenth-century English society; rather, it emphasizes the validity of upper-class rule. It calls, however, for that rule to have a humane and more involved face. All this emphasizes that the lower class and the upper class have to communicate and acknowledge each other's humanity, in a mutual acknowledgement that can only work to strengthen the status quo: "Rich and poor, masters and

men, were then brothers in the deep suffering of the heart; for was not this the very anguish he had felt for little Tom, in years so long gone by, that they seemed like another life!” (366).

This appeal to the ultimate brotherhood of worker and boss serves as still another example of the way in which Gaskell, like Dickens, remains thoroughly inscribed within the bourgeois ideology of her contemporary England. This positioning is not surprising given how powerful and how firmly established that ideology was in that society, where capitalist modernity was more advanced than anywhere else in the world. What might be more surprising, as the following chapter argues, is that bourgeois ideology also exerted a strong gravitational pull on the work of early Russian realist authors such as Nikolai Gogol and Fyodor Dostoevsky. However, while the bourgeois ideology that was so dominant in England exerted a conservative pull that prevented authors such as Dickens and Gaskell from being truly radical in their critique of English capitalism, bourgeois ideology was still a radically progressive force in fundamentally feudal Russia. As a result, the influence of this ideology on Gogol and Dostoevsky was primarily progressive; any limitation it placed on the works of these writers served to prevent them from being as conservative as they might otherwise have liked to be.

Notes

¹ Utilitarianism was an ultra-rational nineteenth-century movement in the philosophy of ethics (epitomized by the work of English thinkers John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham) based on the notion that the goal of any society is to maximize the overall level of well-being of its citizenry as a whole.

² See Brantlinger for a discussion of Dickens' proclamation that the British reaction to the mutiny should perhaps be to "exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested" (206–8). See also William Odie's interesting suggestion that the aversion to revolutionary activity evidenced in *A Tale of Two Cities* may, in some ways, be a reaction to the mutiny.

³ On the politics of Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual, see Radhakrishnan.

⁴ On this cycle of industrial novels, and especially on the place of *Hard Times* in it, see Joshi, who notes, among other things, the striking absence of any real description of working conditions in the mills of Dickens' novel (233).

⁵ One might compare here Barbara Foley's argument that perhaps the greatest limitation of the American proletarian fiction of the 1930s was its inability to break free of the individualist orientation of bourgeois ideology (and of the bourgeois novel as a genre). For Foley, "even multiple protagonist realistic novels are routinely premised upon the primacy of the individual" (364).

⁶ For a discussion of the role of Legh (and of science) in *Mary Barton*, see Secord.

⁷ One might note here Richard Parkinson's 1841 pamphlet *The Present Condition of the Labouring Poor in Manchester with Hints for Improving It*, which similarly recommends familiarity between boss and worker as a key to better conditions for all, suggesting that it should be a universal rule that "the master, or some confidential servant of equal education and influence with the master himself, shall become *personally* acquainted with every workman in his employ" because "it is astonishing how much men are conciliated toward one another simply by becoming personally acquainted" (16). Moretti, in fact, notes that Parkinson here seems to be "foreshadowing" Gaskell (*Bourgeois* 123n.43).

⁸ Randi Koppen sees both Dickens and Gaskell as signs of an important turn toward sentiment in England in the 1840s and 1850s, in what she terms one of the "liveliest and most engaging moments in the cultural history of emotions" (243).

Chapter Three

Oops, I Did It Again: The Accidental Bourgeois Optimism of Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*

The story of Elizabeth Gaskell's John Barton is intended to demonstrate, among other things, that violent crime is not an effective means of social protest and cannot lead to positive social reform. In this, as I argued in the last chapter, Gaskell participates in a widespread discourse of concern about working-class violence in mid-nineteenth-century England. Possibly the best-known story in all of world literature about the ineffectiveness of violent crime as a means of social activism is Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, first published in Russian in 1866. In this, Dostoevsky's novel and Gaskell's have similar messages. However, that these messages arise from such drastically different social and historical contexts suggests that they might have very different implications. In particular, ideological analysis suggests that both English and Russian realist novels of the nineteenth century are strongly impacted by the presence of bourgeois ideology. In England, this ideology is the dominant one, so that bourgeois ideology is necessarily a conservative force that prevents Gaskell's novel from being as radical as it might otherwise be. In Russia, bourgeois ideology is part of a complex structure involving the emergence of a modern Russia from what is still a fundamentally medieval matrix. The richly complex nature of the ideological texture of nineteenth-century Russia is no doubt part of the reason why Russian literature of the period was itself so rich, drawing much of its material from the complex mixture of forces that defined the era. As Pierre Macherey puts it, Dostoyevsky gives us the feudal Russia, Chekhov portrays the rise of the bourgeoisie, Tolstoy depicts the peasant, and Gorky describes the beginnings of the urban proletariat" (111).

The rise of realist fiction as a literary form is a key marker of the impact of bourgeois ideology on nineteenth-century Russian culture. However, the place of bourgeois ideology in this culture implies that realist fiction (even from declaredly traditionalist authors such as Dostoevsky) is a progressive force, regardless of the intentions of the authors, who often treat bourgeois ideology as a foreign intrusion that threatens the moral fabric of Mother Russia.

That bourgeois ideology was already a force in nineteenth-century Russian fiction can be seen by the presence of so many characters in that fiction who are identifiably bourgeois themselves. For example, in his innovative study of the presence of bourgeois characters in literature as a whole, Franco Moretti notes that “if one were to look for a flawless bourgeois nature, the young manager Stolz—German for “pride”—who appears in one of the great Russian novels of the nineteenth century, would be an excellent choice” (Moretti, *Bourgeois* 164). Stolz is an important character in Ivan Goncharov’s *Oblomov* (1859), though Moretti goes on to note the significance of the fact that Stolz is not the protagonist of *Oblomov*, suggesting that such figures are of secondary importance within the social fabric of nineteenth-century Russia.¹

The fact that a traditionalist such as Dostoevsky’s great predecessor Nikolai Gogol has often been declared the “father” of Russian realism indicates just how complex and contradictory the ideological matrix of nineteenth-century Russia could be. Indeed, Gogol himself has often been compared with Dickens, though the exact extent of the influence of Dickens on Gogol seems unclear.² Meanwhile, that the emergence of realism within nineteenth-century Russian literature is closely associated with the modernizing influence of bourgeois ideology can be seen from the fact that Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848), one of the leading progressive political thinkers of nineteenth-century Russia (and a man whose thought was heavily influenced by bourgeois ideas) has also sometimes been thought of as the father of Russian realism.

Belinsky, along with such figures as Alexander Herzen and Mikhail Bakunin, serves as a particularly clear indication of the fact that a complex mixture of intellectual forces informed nineteenth-century Russia, despite the fact that its dominant ideology remained retrograde and essentially medieval. It is particularly telling that Belinsky saw realist literature as the key to modernizing the intellectual climate of early-nineteenth-century Russia, understanding that this literature had already played a similar role in Western Europe. Belinsky was also directly involved with both Gogol and Dostoevsky, particularly in his famous “Letter to N. V. Gogol,” one of his best-known writings. Here, though he had elsewhere expressed support and admiration for Gogol’s writing, Belinsky excoriates Gogol for what he sees as the regressive religious tendencies in Gogol’s fiction and in the nonfiction collection *Correspondence with Friends* (1847). “You have failed to realize,” he charges Gogol, “that Russia sees her salvation not in mysticism or asceticism or pietism, but in the successes of civilization, enlightenment, and humanity” (Matlaw 84).

Belinsky here declares his support for several of the central tenets of bourgeois ideology in a mode that would have seemed quite conventional in England but that was part of a radical political statement in nineteenth-century Russia. Indeed, Belinsky’s letter (which also declares its support for an end to serfdom as well as other social and political reforms) became a highly controversial document. It was, in fact, his professed support for Belinsky’s letter that led to the arrest, conviction, and near-execution of the young Dostoevsky, thus securing the place of the letter as a crucial document in the history of Russian literature.

Belinsky’s concern over the mystical-religious aspects of Gogol’s writing may have been couched in particularly charged terms and positioned as a part of a particularly powerful political declaration, but it remains a fairly conventional view of Gogol’s work. That work is quite

typically seen as breaking new aesthetic ground and paving the way for the great works of Russian realism that followed. It is, nevertheless, seen as remaining firmly rooted in medieval vision of a mystical mother Russia. Indeed, there seems little doubt that Gogol himself entertained such views. That he did so, however, in no way means that his writing cannot also encompass other visions, especially as the realistic mode that he pioneered in Russian literature is itself so firmly tied to the ideology of the West European bourgeoisie whom Gogol himself saw as so thoroughly decadent and spiritually bankrupt.

One of the most firmly established notions in the history of Marxist criticism is that ideology informs literary texts in complex ways that often go far beyond the ideological inclinations of the authors (which themselves can be quite complex). Probably the most notable case in point is Honoré de Balzac, a favorite realist novelist of Marxist critics since at least Engels, who have seen him as perhaps the greatest of all bourgeois realist writers—despite the fact that Balzac himself was thoroughly anti-bourgeois in his own thinking, a nostalgic advocate of France's *ancien régime* who was horrified by the historical advent of capitalism. For Balzac, the French Revolution (and the historical advance of bourgeois rule that followed it) destroyed a more genteel world based on traditional, commonly-held values and respect for human relationships, replacing that world with a new, materialist one driven by greed and a never-ending quest for money. Yet Balzac also understood that the historical victory of European capitalism over its feudal predecessor was, by the early nineteenth century, a foregone conclusion. Indeed, what Balzac's novels collectively represent is nothing less than this ongoing historical process, which Jameson has labeled the "bourgeois cultural revolution," arguing that it can be regarded as "the only true Event of history," meaning "history" as described via the scientific historiography developed by bourgeois historians in the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries and developed into a more sophisticated and theoretically coherent form by Marx himself (*Signatures* 227).

Georg Lukács's monumental *The Historical Novel* may be best known for resurrecting the reputation of Walter Scott (whom Lukács sees as the father of the modern historical novel), but it is in fact Balzac (himself a great admirer of Scott) who emerges as the ultimate hero of Lukács's book and as the greatest practitioner of not only the historical novel, but the bourgeois realist novel in general. And it is precisely the ability of Balzac to capture the historical impulse that Jameson calls the bourgeois cultural revolution that makes him, for Lukács and other Marxist critics, such a special writer.

The historical situation in nineteenth-century Russia—where the bourgeoisie were just emerging as a historical force and had obviously *not* emerged as historical victors over a still firmly entrenched Russian aristocracy—was decidedly different. Nevertheless, Lukács is also a great admirer of Gogol and his ability to capture this historical situation in his writing. Focusing especially on the long historical story *Taras Bulba* (1835, revised and expanded in 1842, based on a variety of materials from eighteenth-century Russian history), Lukács finds that this story of the beginning of the disintegration of traditional (pre-capitalist) Cossack society in Russia “is more national, more unified and more epic in character than even the stories of Scott” (*Historical* 74). For Lukács, Gogol parlays an understanding of the historical necessity of the downfall of Cossack society into a tale of “almost Homeric, national-epic breadth of theme whose possibilities Gogol as a really great artist is able fully to utilize” (74).

In short, despite his reputation as a Slavophile and supporter of traditional Russian society (the 1842 revision was performed largely to make the tale more “Russian” in nature, for example), Gogol for Lukács understands that traditional Russian society stands in the way of an

historical process of modernization that it cannot ultimately hope to resist, placing him in very much the same position as Balzac, except for the fact that Balzac's France is already much farther along the historical timeline of capitalist modernization than is Gogol's Russia. Indeed, while Gogol's vision of Russian history was rather idealized, he interestingly viewed much of this history from afar, spending much of his adult life in Western Europe, amid precisely the historical processes that Balzac was describing in his fiction. As Elizabeth Cheresch Allen has noted, Gogol's own political conservatism meant that his satirical works (such as "The Overcoat") were designed to encourage individuals to modify certain specific behaviors rather than to encourage systemic social or political change. Gogol, in fact, deemed "the reigning tsarist political system a divinely ordained institution with no conceivable alternative" (Allen 305). Still, Allen goes on, this personal conservatism did not prevent Gogol's works from having what was in fact a "socially and politically progressive, even subversive, effect" (306).

My argument is that Gogol here once again resembles Balzac in that the overall implication of his works was often quite at odds with his personal beliefs, and for the same reason: the presence of bourgeois ideology in his works. In this sense, my argument draws both upon Marxist insights and upon Bakhtin's overall vision that "genres themselves embody specific worldviews" so that "individual practitioners of a given genre are not fully in control of the ideological implications of the works they produce in that genre" (Booker and Juraga 61). Indeed, Bakhtin himself singles out Gogol's *Dead Souls* as an example of this effect, noting that Gogol seems to be attempting to tell a story of Christian salvation that could not succeed because the monological nature of this project is inimical to the fundamentally dialogical nature of the novel as a genre. "The tragedy of Gogol," Bakhtin declares, "is to a very real extent the tragedy of a genre" (*Dialogic* 28).

While Bakhtin's emphasis is on monologism versus dialogism, my argument hinges on the notion that, while Gogol often attempts in his writing to tell stories that provide warnings against the intrusion of Westernizing influences (which can be taken as virtually synonymous with bourgeois ideology), the realist mode in which he works lends itself so well to the expression of bourgeois ideas and attitudes that it is virtually impossible for Gogol to prevent such ideas from creeping into his work. The presence of bourgeois ideology in Gogol's work can be seen in such phenomena as his understanding of the necessity of the historical process of modernization in *Taras Bulba* or in the tendency of the moralizing tale of *Dead Souls* to degenerate into near-farce. However, bourgeois ideology can also be detected even in such tales as "The Overcoat," which have no such obviously bourgeois overarching dimension. The story combines a careful eye for detail and social satire on the dehumanizing, alienating bureaucratic world of St. Petersburg. It is also a critique of the nineteenth-century Russian urban clerical hierarchy and its cruelty, falsity, vanity, and pretentiousness—though it certainly stops far short of any call to do away with this hierarchy or even to renovate it in some way, but simply suggests that the individuals who occupy positions in this hierarchy should be more considerate of the feelings and problems of others within that system, especially others who occupy lower positions than themselves.

This story, widely considered to be one of the foundations of nineteenth-century Russian realism, engages with social problems to accentuate awareness and expose injustice, focusing most importantly on the plight of the lower-class individuals. It would seem to be a classic critique of the dehumanizing consequences of the rigid structure of Russia's nineteenth-century bureaucracy, including a cry for compassion for the "little man" of the kind for which Gogol's work is justifiably well known. There is no doubt that this cry was not meant by Gogol as a call

for individualist respect for such little men; nor was it meant as a call to modernize the system, including the installation of greater flexibility of a kind that could lead to upward mobility and to greater opportunities for advancement on the part of little men like the story's protagonist, n. On the other hand, the complete absence of true individualist impulses in the bureaucracy of the story combines with the tragic nature of Akaky's life to suggest, by its very absence, the possibility that a more modern (and more individualist) version of the system might have offered Akaky a chance for a much better life.

Akaky is, from the very beginning, a sort of Russian man without qualities, a hollow man, a blank, a nothing. When he is born, for example, his family struggles to find a name for the newcomer in their midst, but ultimately give up in frustration. Instead, he is simply given the name of his father (also a civil servant, of course), a practice that was not particularly unusual in nineteenth-century Russia, but still one that suggests, within the context and overall implication of the story, the extent to which, from the very beginning, Akaky has no real identity of his own (395). It is, therefore, not surprising that this infant will grow up to become a faceless clerk in a giant Russian bureaucracy that was famous for swallowing up such workers amid a crowd of clerks, each interchangeable with and indistinguishable from all the others.

At first glance, the nonspecific nature of Akaky might seem an anti-individualist gesture on the part of Gogol, who, as a matter of fact, was consistent about refusing the kind of specific individualizing details that have typically been seen as characteristic of literary realism. For example, in his canonical study of the rise of the modern bourgeois novel in eighteenth-century England, Ian Watt notes the key role played by "realistic particularity" in this rise, so that the realist novel stands apart from other literary forms largely due to the "amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualization of its characters and to the detailed presentation

of their environment (17-18). Among other things, Watt notes that the action in realist novels typically takes place in real locations, or at least in locations (Dickens' Coketown would be a good example) that appear to be quite similar to specific real-world locations. Yet Eric Auerbach notes that Gogol is rather typical of nineteenth-century Russian literature in treating the country and its people as an undifferentiated uniform mass, free of geographical or racial variation. He singles out Gogol's *Dead Souls* and *The Inspector General* as paragons of this effect, noting the way in which Gogol tends not even to name specific locations, but instead to use generalized place names, such as "a provincial town" (Auerbach 522). In "The Overcoat," Gogol makes it clear that the action is taking place in St. Petersburg, seat of the central government of the Russian Empire and thus also the center of its vast bureaucracy. Instead, he shifts the vague and general nature of his characterizations from geography to that bureaucracy, noting in the very beginning of the story that it is about a civil servant who works in a "department," the identity of which is purposely being withheld by the narrator in order to avoid offending anyone or bringing their ire down upon him: "There is nothing more irascible than all these departments, regiments—in short, all this officialdom" (394).

In this way, the narrator (who is quite clearly distinct from Gogol himself, in the Russian *skaz* tradition of folk storytelling) not only calls attention to the lack of specificity in identifying the department in which Akaky works, but also uses that lack to score a satirical point. Meanwhile, the narrator is much more specific about Akaky's position within the hierarchy of the bureaucracy, noting that he is an "eternal titular councillor," which places him in a low rank at which "all sorts of writers have abundantly sneered and jeered" (394). In short, Akaky's rank (in a rank-obsessed society) is so unremarkable as to draw special attention, so ordinary as to be extraordinary—as is Akaky himself. Thus, even all the other nondescript clerks in his department

single him out as the object of their jabs and jokes, spicing up the incredible boredom of their long days at work by mocking Akaky and hurling abuse at him, mistreatment to which his reaction is so feeble and ineffectual as itself to be a great source of humor for his tormentors—and no source whatsoever of solace to Akaky.

Gogol draws the character of this inoffensive civil servant with compassion, simplicity, and gentle humor by depicting how Akaky, who is almost comically sincere in his work, endures the cruelties of his coworkers. Although all the young clerks with him in the office “poked fun at him and cracked jokes,” Akaky goes on “as if no one was there; it did not even affect the work he did: amidst all this pestering, he made not a single error in his copy” (396). Gogol highlights how the social misfit Akaky, who is treated in society as an object of mockery or (at best) charity, deserves to be treated as a human being who has much right to happiness as anyone else, despite his lowly origins in an unimportant family and his unimpressive position within the hierarchy of his department. Akaky, the story suggests, deserves to be regarded with respect simply because he is a human being, even though there is nothing about him that stands out as an individual—except the fact that he is so unremarkable that his lack of individual distinguishing characteristics in itself sets him apart from his fellow workers.

Akaky indeed manages to be an outsider in this department, where everyone else is seemingly the same. Moreover, a closer look at the story shows that Gogol draws upon several storytelling traditions that, in dialogue with “The Overcoat,” help to set Akaky apart from the mainstream. Iu. Mann has discussed the way the fact that Akaky is an unusual figure amid this organization of identical drones, suggesting that the copyist can be read within the tradition of the “holy fool” in a way that is illuminated by Bakhtin’s discussion of carnivalesque inversions.³ On the other hand, Mann notes that Akaky deviates from this tradition in the way he is “utterly

nonideological” with no axe whatsoever to grind, absolutely no interest in influencing anyone, and no lessons he is trying to teach or points that he is trying to make about anything with his unusual behavior (17).

Akaky is described as having a “hemorrhoidal” complexion due to the climate of St. Petersburg. Otherwise, he is “short, somewhat pockmarked, somewhat red-haired, even with a somewhat nearsighted look, slightly bald in front, with wrinkles on both cheeks” (394). Akaky is thus about as unremarkable looking as it is possible to be, each of his already extremely ordinary physical qualities made all the more unstriking by the stream of qualifying “somewhats” and the “slightly” that are used to ensure the reader that there is nothing about these qualities that stands out at all. The only thing that does seem to stand out about Akaky is the fact that he is unusually good at his work as a copyist—not because he has especially beautiful (or even legible) handwriting or is especially fast at the task of copying, but simply because he is extraordinarily accurate at reproducing the documents that are placed in front of him. In machine-like fashion, he is able to make flawless copies of the documents that are placed in front of him, a “talent” that is no doubt enhanced by the fact that he himself seemingly has absolutely nothing original to contribute to anything. His own lack of originality also helps to explain why he takes such pleasure in the ultimate routine of this repetitive task that we are told “he served with love” (397).

Akaky’s love for his work as a copyist does give the seemingly mundane and mechanical task an almost artistic dimension. On the other hand, he has no particular devotion to (or even interest in) the overall mission of his department. He is not even interested in the documents he copies. Instead, his attention is focused on individual letters, which he lovingly copies one by one without any real sense of the context in which they appear. Indeed, Akaky’s humanity is

reduced to the point that he finds his only source of happiness in the shape of certain letters he constantly copies. Immersed in these letters, he is thoroughly removed (the Marxist term would be “alienated”) from the world around him, never noticing it or his fellow workers, just as they and his overseers tend not to notice him: “They not only did not rise from their places when he passed, but did not even look at him, as if a mere fly had flown through the reception room” (396). The only notice he receives is as a recipient of commands, the orders to copy documents coming to him very much as a more modern-day office worker might push the buttons to operate a photocopy machine: “His superiors treated him somehow with cold despotism. Some chief clerk’s assistant simply shoved papers under his nose without even saying ‘Copy them’” (235).

At the same time, Akaky accepts these commands without question or protest, performing his mechanical tasks so consistently that, at one point, his years of reliable service as a copyist are rewarded when he is given the more challenging task of repurposing a document from another department for use in his own by making some minor modifications: “The matter consisted merely in changing the heading and changing some verbs from first to third person” (397). However, far from being honored or inspired by this job that seems at least slightly more interesting than his usual assignments, Akaky is overwhelmed by the responsibility of having to provide even a minimum amount of his own input to the document. He is, in fact, completely unable to perform this simple task of modification. Like his fellow copyist Bartleby, he would prefer not to undertake this new work; bathed in sweat, he completely breaks down when faced with the task of producing original content and instead begs to be given another task in which he can simply copy a document exactly, with no added input of his own.

Akaky, then, is trapped in his position, both by the nature of the system and by his own inability to even imagine being in a different position:

However many directors and other superiors came and went, he was always to be seen in one and the same place, in the same position, in the same capacity, as the same copying clerk, so that after a while they became convinced that he must have been born into the world ready-made, in a uniform and with a balding head. (396)

Importantly, however, Akaky is *willingly* trapped. He has no desire to advance or even to vary the routine of his endless days of toil, because he so thoroughly accepts the notion that the position he occupies is the appropriate one for him.

The conditions in Akaky's department epitomize those that Michel Foucault has described as "carceral," especially in his classic study *Discipline and Punish*. Here, in what is ostensibly a survey of the history of the modern prison, Foucault concludes that most modern institutions and modern society as a whole function very much according to the same principles as the prison. For Foucault, factories, schools, churches and the like all operate to ensure the willing obedience of the general population to their society's dominant ideology, partly because they confuse the demands of their society with their own desires and partly through the panoptical effect of inducing individuals to act at all times as if they are under surveillance by official authority. Foucault suggests that modern "prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons" (228). Importantly, Foucault's vision of a carceral society is clearly a vision of a modern *bourgeois* society, in which these knowledge-based, psychologically-oriented practices of power operate in a manner distinctively different from that of medieval Europe, where official power tended to be exercised via physical violence on the bodies of individual subjects. That Foucault's vision applies so well to the situation in which Akaky spends so much of his life is one indication of the extent to which bourgeois ideology (and bourgeois values) had already penetrated the Russian society of Gogol's time.

The main narrative of “The Overcoat” is initiated when Akaky realizes that his old, tattered overcoat is far from adequate to the task of protecting him from another grueling St. Petersburg winter. As winter approaches, the unnoticed and underpaid Akaky finds that his old overcoat, which has clearly been mended for ages by his tailor Petrovich, is no longer mendable and must now be replaced, as Petrovich explains: “And it appears you’ll have to have a new overcoat made” (403). Akaky at first finds the idea of buying a new coat unthinkable because of the expense involved in such a purchase: “‘How’s that—new?’ he said, as if in a sleep. ‘I have no money for that’” (403). As a member of the lower class with an income to match his status, he must constantly struggle to maintain his meager existence, even without special expenses. Only after a considerable struggle, sacrificing numerous other amenities, can a man like Akaky achieve buying a coat. His salary is barely above the subsistence level, requiring the humiliating daily sacrifices of sleeping hungry and walking on tiptoe while wearing his old shoes to avoid needing to mend them again. He puts himself on a strict budget that dictates an inhumane lifestyle for an entire year so he can buy a new coat. Money becomes the central focus of Akaky’s life, again marking the encroachment of bourgeois values into his society, though he himself is so poor that his focus is really *lack* of money.

While Akaky is a clerk (sometimes translated as an “official”) and thus might be regarded as a member of the petty bourgeoisie, he effectively occupies a position of economic and social status that is working class, except that capitalism was not sufficiently advanced in nineteenth-century Russia for a genuine working class (in the sense of the proletariat described by Marx) to develop. Still, his lowly economic status becomes quite clear as he must work for months, scraping and saving, to be able to attain what the elite class takes for granted. But the very process of suffering to save for the coat brings new meaning to his life, as the new garment takes

on faux-magical qualities: “his very existence became somehow fuller, as if he were married” (406). The almost mystical quality of the overcoat is thus reminiscent of the commodity fetish as described by Marx in the first volume of *Capital*, where he notes that the mystical properties with which we invest commodities can be understood only by analogy to “the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world” (Tucker 321).

Previously ignored by everyone, the newly-coated Akaky suddenly gains improved status, if only for a day, when everyone begins to notice him because of the new garment. Immediately, he gains the respect of those who never seemed to notice his existence and is even invited to a party in honor of his new overcoat, which at last gives Akaky a special quality that distinguishes him from those around him. Unfortunately (and Gogol here remains in the staunchly anti-bourgeois mode of criticizing this reliance on a material commodity for happiness), possessions like the new overcoat can be fleeting. While walking home after the party, Akaky is robbed of his coat—on the very day he acquired it.

The remainder of the story involves Akaky’s attempts to retrieve the overcoat, which eventually derail his entire life and drive him to an early death. Advised by his landlady, he goes the next day to the police to report the theft of his overcoat. His first encounter with the district police commissioner shows how, like everyone, else the police commissioner is also caught up in the bureaucratic system. The commissioner wants to practice his role of power (and make himself feel more important) by forcing Akaky to wait and by constantly distracting him from the central problem, being more concerned with official procedures and protocol than with fighting crime. He occupies himself with trivial details and demands that Akaky provide proof of ownership of the coat, essentially avoiding the necessity to take any actual action to retrieve the coat or track down the criminal who stole it.

Having concluded that the police will be no help, Akaky is advised the next day at work to go see an *important person* (emphasis in original), who can perhaps use his influence to help Akaky get his overcoat back. Gogol's character is the epitome of the futility and sham of bureaucracy, his importance being merely a matter of his rank and having nothing to do with his individual virtues or abilities. The officious important person is concerned with little other than acting the part of being important. He is totally caught up in instituting rules and practices that impose servility on his staff and in instituting complex procedures for admittance of visitors to his important presence. Although, he likes to think of himself as a humble person, he wants to prove to the people from his social circle that he is as superior as they. Gogol mocks not only the pretentiousness of the important person, but the obsequiousness of his underlings, who are eager both to please him and to be like him, though Gogol also notes that they are certainly not alone in this respect: "Everything in holy Russia is infected with imitation, and each one mimics and apes his superior" (415).

After receiving Akaky into his office, the important person, who has recently been upgraded to his position and thus wants to make sure to demonstrate his new importance, receives a visit from a friend. He wants to impress his friend, so he puts Akaky through so much humiliation in front of him that Akaky is near fainting. He shouts at Akaky: "'Do you know to whom you are saying this? Do you realize who is standing before you? Do you realize, I ask you?'" (418). Meanwhile, he berates Akaky for apparently not having the same respect for authority and procedure that he himself has, insisting that Akaky has not made his request through the proper channels: "'Do you not know the order? What are you doing here? Do you not know how cases are conducted?'" (417).

Not surprisingly, Akaky's attempt to get back his overcoat through the important person results in nothing but embarrassment and despondence for Akaky. Depressed not only by the loss of his new coat but now also by his treatment at the hands of the police and (especially) the important person, Akaky falls into a fever, experiences hallucinations, and dies within a few days. Even his sickness and death, though, seem fairly routine and uneventful, less a matter of the earth-shattering fatalities often found in literature and more a matter of the "she had ceased to exist" of Flaubert's *Emma Bovary*. Soon he is buried, leaving no trace of his former existence. Indeed, while Emma at least leaves behind a grieving Charles, Akaky leaves no one who misses him in either his personal or his professional life. Once it is finally noticed in the department that he is even missing, he is quickly replaced by another anonymous drone at his position there, while St. Petersburg as a whole goes on as if nothing had happened:

Akaky Akakievich was taken away and buried. And St. Petersburg was left without Akaky Akakievich, as if he had never been there. Vanished and gone was the being, protected by no one, dear to no one, interesting to no one, who had not even attracted the attention of a naturalist—who does not fail to stick a pin through a common fly and examine it under a microscope. (419)

On the other hand, we are told, "there had flashed a bright visitor in the form of an overcoat, animating for an instant his poor life" (419–20).

"The Overcoat" examines a bureaucratic world of alienation, especially for those occupying the lower rungs of the social ladder. People are valued only for their rank, not for their actual individual qualities; they gain respect only by achieving a high rank, not by performing impressive (or unselfish) deeds. In a sense, then, Gogol's critique of the bureaucracy and overall social system of nineteenth-century Russia is oddly reminiscent of Marx's discussion of the impact of commodification under capitalism. All commodities with the same exchange value on the open market are interchangeable with one another; meanwhile, commodities are valued only

for this exchange value (the amount of cash they can fetch in a sale) and not for their real properties or for their “use value”—what they can actually be used to accomplish. Importantly, of course, Marx extends this critique of literal commodities to human beings, arguing that all human relationships are ultimately reduced, under capitalism, to economic ones and that human beings themselves are ultimately reduced to the status of commodities, valued not for who they really are but for the role they play within the capitalist economic system in which they live, work, and consume. From this point of view, bourgeois individualism is a sham, a form of window-dressing designed to encourage individuals to strive and compete (working harder and consuming more), but ultimately depriving them of any chance to be truly distinct from other individuals, who are striving for the same goals in very much the same ways.

One of the consequences of this commodification of human beings is a tendency to treat other human beings as objects, rather than as subjects like oneself. Once the humanity of others has been devalued in this way, all sorts of cruelty to others is enabled and rationalized. Gogol makes exactly the same point about nineteenth-century Russia: “How much inhumanity there is in man, how much savage coarseness is concealed in refined, cultivated manners, and God! even in a man the world regards as noble and honorable” (397).

This brutality ultimately brings about Akaky’s demise. At this point, however, this story of the boring routine in a Russian bureaucratic office takes a sudden, fantastic turn—though a turn for which we have, in fact, been prepared by the previous presentation of Akaky’s new overcoat as having mystical qualities. In the wake of Akaky’s death, a ghost (apparently that of a meek clerk, though one now energized by supernatural power and a lust for revenge) suddenly begins to appear in the streets of St. Petersburg, terrorizing everyone by stopping them on the streets to inspect their overcoats, as if it is trying to identify a particular coat that has perhaps

been lost or stolen. It is not immediately clear that the ghost is that of Akaky, though it does appear from its actions that the ghost is seeking a lost overcoat. Finally, the ghost is identified as Akaky when it confronts the important person and makes off with that person's grand overcoat in a sort of supernatural retribution.

This event brings to an end the appearances of the ghost, though isolated reports of ghostly sightings continue to occur on the outskirts of town: the ghost is apparently now satisfied, further suggesting that its emergence was related to the search for an overcoat. Meanwhile, the chastened important person, who had already felt a certain twinge of guilt over the way he had treated Akaky, mends his ways and begins to act in a less arrogant and imperious way, though there are hints that his "conversion" may be a bit half-hearted and possibly temporary: "It was not so frequently now that his subordinates heard him say, 'How dare you, sir? Do you realize who you're talking to, sir?' And if he did say it, it was only after he had heard what it was all about" (270–71).

The slight changes in the important person after he has been robbed of his overcoat by the ghost suggest that the bureaucratic system is amendable by individual action, though, again, it is not entirely clear how much irony is involved in this motif or how sincere the change in the important person might be. Meanwhile, in the wake of the disappearance of Akaky's ghost, a seemingly new ghost appears in the streets of St. Petersburg, this one large, powerful, imposing, and extremely masculine—tall, with huge fists and "an enormous mustache" (424). It is left to the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about the identity of the new ghost and its relationship with the ghost of Akaky, but it seems logical to read this new ghost as Akaky's ghost transformed by the magic of at last being in possession of an impressive overcoat—the one taken from the important person. As is consistently the case in this story (and in *skaz* narratives

in general) one must ask just how much irony is to be read into this motif, but it is certainly the case that this final twist seems to confirm the magical power of the overcoat-as-commodity-fetish, a confirmation that can be taken as an expression of a very bourgeois attitude toward material goods.

When the rhetorical complexities of Gogol's *skaz* technique, which make it clear that the narrator's perspective is different from that of the author, are combined with Gogol's own complex and contradictory attitudes, it becomes clear that "The Overcoat" is a richly dialogical text (in the Bakhtinian sense) that combines a number of different ideological positions without favoring any of these positions over the others. That bourgeois ideology is so clearly one of these positions within the text is indicative of the fact that this ideology was beginning to make itself felt in nineteenth-century Russia, despite the fact that it had yet to become dominant there—and despite the fact that Gogol does not clearly or consistently embrace that ideology.

On the other hand, the very fact that Gogol adopts such a pluralistic dialogical approach is indicative of the fact that bourgeois ideology exerts a stronger pull on the text than might be immediately obvious.⁴ After all, Bakhtin's well-known contrast between the richly dialogic carnivalism of the writing of Rabelais and the stern, humorless monologism of the official ideology of that writer's medieval context makes Rabelais a key literary harbinger of the coming of capitalist modernization in Western Europe. By this extension, this same contrast can be applied to Gogol and his largely-medieval nineteenth-century Russian context, making Gogol an important harbinger of the rise of bourgeois ideology in Russia. Meanwhile, the evocation of Bakhtin in this context leads to the work of Dostoevsky, the writer whom Bakhtin regarded as exemplary in terms of his ability to allow different ideologies to sound within his work. From this point of view, Bakhtin's seemingly surprising identification of Dostoevsky as the paragon of

“polyphony” also becomes a suggestion of the power of bourgeois ideology within the seemingly Slavophilic texture of Dostoevsky’s writing.

Bakhtin, of course, was not the first to note the multiplicity of voices in Dostoevsky’s writing. Indeed, much of the initial chapter of *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (in which Bakhtin lays out his vision of Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel) is devoted to a dialogue with Anatoly Lunacharsky’s identification of “multivoicedness” as a key property of Dostoevsky’s writing. The Marxist Lunacharsky was the first Soviet People’s Commissar of Education and was, among other things, one of the architects of the astonishingly successful literacy education program in the postrevolutionary Soviet Union. He was also a literary critic who put much energy into the exploration of ways in which art and literature might be used to further education (and the cause of socialism) in the new nation.

For Lunacharsky, Dostoevsky’s work is marked by profound contradictions and by the simultaneous presence of profoundly different ideologies within the same work. Importantly, Lunacharsky argued that Dostoevsky himself was not the master of these ideologies, which were a reflection of the contradictory nature of the historical climate in which he worked in nineteenth-century Russia. Bakhtin largely accepts Lunacharsky’s vision of the genesis of Dostoevsky’s polyphony in his historical epoch, agreeing that

The exceptionally acute contradictions of early Russian capitalism and the duality of Dostoevsky as a social personality, his personal inability to take a definite ideological stand, are, if taken by themselves, something negative and historically transitory, but they proved to be the optimal conditions for creating the polyphonic novel. (*Problems* 35).

However, while Bakhtin agrees with Lunacharsky that Dostoevsky’s context led to the birth of the polyphonic novel, he does not agree with Lunacharsky’s argument that, with the death of

capitalism, this kind of novel will die out as well. Bakhtin, in fact, argues that “Dostoevsky’s discovery of the polyphonic novel will outlive capitalism” (36).

Bakhtin’s argument here is part of his overall notion that the novel as a genre has a long history that dates back to the ancient Greeks, so that the “rise” of the bourgeois novel in the eighteenth century was just a particular chapter in a longer story and not a fundamentally new phenomenon. For Bakhtin, the novel as a genre has a nearly infinite flexibility that allows it to incorporate virtually any ideology or combination of ideologies. His conclusion about the trans-capitalist nature of Dostoevsky’s novels cannot be checked against historical fact, given that capitalism still lives—which might also explain why Dostoevsky’s novels still, in many ways, seem so contemporary today. What is clear in any case, though, is that a recognition of the impact of the early stirrings of capitalism in Russia is crucial to Bakhtin’s highly influential reading of Dostoevsky’s novels.

Others, of course, have noted this impact as well. Dominick La Capra, for example, argues that the most important historical condition for understanding Dostoevsky’s novels involves the breakdown of religious tradition in nineteenth-century Russia in the face of Westernizing capitalist modernization. La Capra notes that “for Dostoevsky, the West itself embodied an ideology of free, critical inquiry and secular rationalism that endangered religious faith” (35). It is certainly the case that all of Dostoevsky’s writing is informed by a sense of crisis, by a sense that traditional Russian religious values are under siege by the contaminating secularist rationalism of Western Europe.⁵

La Capra goes on to note that Dostoevsky’s *Underground Man* (discussed in Chapter 5 below) is the epitome of the Westernized intellectual, one of the key carriers of this phenomenon. However, it is certainly the case that Rodion Raskolnikov (surely one of the

greatest and best-known characters in the entire history of the novel) also embodies a number of the key symptoms of the intrusion of capitalist modernization (and bourgeois ideology) into nineteenth-century Russia. For one thing, the entire plot of *Crime and Punishment* revolves around money and greed, and Raskolnikov's focus on money is in itself a sign of the impact of bourgeois ideology. Raskolnikov, meanwhile, may not himself be a full-fledged intellectual, because he was never able to complete his schooling (due, of course, to the lack of money), but he shows a number of intellectual characteristics, including a tendency toward highly detailed analysis and planning, attempting to make of every activity a sort of scientifically designed undertaking. Finally, Raskolnikov's bitterness and resentment toward almost everyone (and especially toward those with more money than himself) makes him a paragon of the Nietzschean phenomenon of *ressentiment*, which Fredric Jameson has identified as a key psychological result of bourgeois hegemony in the nineteenth century.

Ostensibly, *Crime and Punishment* proposes social reform through religion. However, as with all of Dostoevsky's writing, the actual message delivered by the text may be far more complex than it first appears—or than Dostoevsky apparently intended. The novel is an imaginary case study of Dostoevsky's belief that suffering is a punishment for sin and only confession can lead to the redemption that will improve a society dominated by glaring social injustice. In telling this tale, Dostoevsky creates in Raskolnikov one of the great paragons of guilt in all of world literature, a figure in fact whose very name is virtually synonymous with being tortured by regret of one's own misdeeds.

Raskolnikov is such a brilliant character, however, because his psychology is so complex and realistic, containing a number of different characteristics in addition to the dominant one of guilt. For my purposes, the most important of these other characteristics the extreme resentment

he feels toward others and toward the world around him (which he thinks has treated him unfairly and has not offered him the opportunities he deserves). Moreover, this resentment is of the distinctively bourgeois form that Jameson has discussed as *ressentiment*, which Nietzsche associated with the slave mentality of Christianity, but which Jameson specifically associates with the attitudes of alienated intellectuals in works by writers such as George Gissing. For Jameson, this attitude typically results from the situation in which such alienated intellectuals find themselves: having no recourse to actions that can improve the conditions they feel are unfairly binding and limiting them, their only option is to seek refuge in “imaginary vengeance” (201).

What makes Raskolnikov such an original character is that his imaginary vengeance turns into real action, even if it is misdirected and ineffectual, while at the same time most of the action in which he is involved still remains firmly ensconced within his own imaginary space. Indeed, for Jameson Dostoevsky is a key example of a writer who associates misplaced support for revolutionary political action with *ressentiment*, turning the latter into an important counterrevolutionary trope (202). On this reading, *Crime and Punishment* first appears to be precisely what Dostoevsky meant for it to be: a denunciation of political radicalism as little more than a disguise for personal bitterness and frustration and of revolution as merely an outlet for personal antagonisms.

One could argue here, of course, that Dostoevsky resents Raskolnikov’s *ressentiment* and that his dismissal of progressive political action throughout his later career as a writer might at least partly derive from the frustration of the author’s own youthful political activism—which famously led to his near execution in 1849 as part of the Russian crackdown on political activity in response to the revolutionary fervor that swept Western Europe in 1848. Indeed, Jameson says

very much the same thing about Gissing's treatment of his own character Richard Mutimer (in his 1886 novel *Demos*); Jameson even goes so far as to suggest that "the theory of *ressentiment*, wherever it appears, will always itself be the expression and the production of *ressentiment*" (*Political* 202). In short, Dostoevsky's critique of the bourgeois experience of *ressentiment* may suggest certain bourgeois inclinations of his own. However, Dostoevsky's own inclinations and intentions, while not entirely irrelevant, certainly do not tell the whole story of this complex and crucial novel.

Jameson's reading of Gissing is again relevant here. Invoking Dostoevsky's great advocate Bakhtin, Jameson argues that *ressentiment* in Gissing has a specific class-based dialogic texture in which Gissing's own resentment of the lower classes and identification with the upper classes simultaneously includes a resentment of those same upper classes as well, "tending to embarrass and to compromise even those on whose behalf it seemed to testify" (203). This same sort of double-voicedness is, of course, precisely the quality that Bakhtin finds so appealing in Dostoevsky's writing, which is thoroughly infused with bourgeois ideas even as it rejects in horror all that bourgeois modernization stands for in the context of nineteenth-century Russia.

In this sense, it is crucial to understand how thoroughly bourgeois Raskolnikov is, despite his own seeming rejection of bourgeois values—and his own antagonism against the petty bourgeois pawnbroker, as well as other obviously bourgeois characters in the novel, such as Luzhin and Svidrigailov, does not in the least suggest that his attitudes escape the domination of bourgeois ideology. Within the competitive ethos of capitalism, nothing is more bourgeois than antagonism against other members of the bourgeoisie, just as (given the emphasis on innovation

and on displacement of the status quo), nothing is more capitalism than a critical stance toward the current modes of operation of the capitalist system.

Raskolnikov is not without sympathy or virtue, and Dostoevsky's refusal to paint him in a completely negative light is one of the key achievements of this seminal novel. Still, one of the things that is most clear about his depiction is that (as opposed to the case of Gaskell's John Barton) there is no question of Raskolnikov being an organic working-class intellectual of the kind described by Gramsci. In addition to the fact of the underdevelopment of the working class itself in nineteenth-century Russia, Raskolnikov is thoroughly alienated with no sense of class consciousness whatsoever. In high bourgeois mode, he sees himself as an extraordinary individual who has little in common with anyone else, and any visions he might have of working to achieve justice for others arise from his condescending sense of being superior to those others, rather than of being at one with them. He may be as poor as the poor folk he sees as benefitting from his crimes, but that is all he feels he has in common with them: he views himself as being able to help them because he has insights and abilities that go far beyond any that they might be able to achieve from their meager perspectives.

Crime and Punishment is justifiably famous for its realistic and detailed depiction of Raskolnikov's psychological state—his thoughts and his motivations leading up to his crime, but even more importantly the guilt he suffers as he attempts to cope with the realization of what he has done. Of course, the very notion that the psychological states of individuals are the most crucial aspect of human existence—a notion that centrally informs all of Dostoevsky's work—is perhaps the most bourgeois notion of all. Thus, at a fundamental level, Dostoevsky's work might be far more bourgeois than any purely thematic reading of the plot would suggest.

This plot is itself simple, but informed by complex psychological ramifications. After observing Alyona Ivanovna, an old pawnbroker who accrues wealth from the misfortunes of others (making her a sort of allegorical stand-in for the capitalist system itself), Raskolnikov develops such bitterness toward the crude and unpleasant woman that he decides to murder her, rationalizing the action on the grounds that it will prevent her from doing further harm in the world, while providing the additional justification that he will rob her after killing her and then use the loot derived from the robbery to do good deeds that will help alleviate precisely the sort of suffering that she herself has propagated.

For Raskolnikov, then, the murder and robbery of the pawnbroker constitute a crime of principle and an act that will supposedly strike a blow against injustice—much in the way that John Barton had conceived of crime as a potential mode of political action. It is clear, however, that Raskolnikov also has additional selfish reasons for committing this crime, feeling that committing the act will somehow help him to achieve his individual potential, a potential that has thus far been left unfulfilled due, he believes, to an unjust system that has not offered him the opportunities he deserves. In short, while he might struggle mightily to convince himself that he is striking a blow for justice, he is acting largely from his own individual *ressentiment*. As with Barton, crime becomes an individual action, not a political one; as with Gaskell (though in a more sophisticated way), Dostoevsky declares this sort of action reprehensible and lacking in any genuine utopian potential.

Raskolnikov's status as an intellectual can be seen from the fact that, despite the bitterness of his resentment toward the old pawnbroker, his killing of her is hardly an impulsive crime of passion. It is an act that he thinks about almost compulsively before committing it: imagining and rehearsing the crime and even carefully counting the number of steps (730) from

his lodging to hers. More to the point, however, is the fact that Raskolnikov is a theoretician of crime, having authored a published article on crime and its origins that ultimately serves as a sort of justification for his own eventual turn to murder and robbery. In particular, in the article he divides individuals into the ordinary and the extraordinary, arguing that different rules of behavior should apply to the two categories. Moreover, while he does not say so directly, Raskolnikov clearly believes that he himself belongs in the latter category, inflating his own importance to place his tawdry crime on the same level as the exploits of great leaders from history.

The lawgivers and founders of mankind, starting from the most ancient and going on to the Lyncurguses, Solons, the Muhammads, the Napoleons, and so forth, that all of them to a man were criminals, from the very fact alone that in giving a new law they thereby violated the old one, held sacred by society and passed down from their fathers, and they certainly did not stop at shedding blood either, if it happened that blood (sometimes quite innocent and shed valiantly for the ancient law) could help them. It is even remarkable that most of these benefactors and founders of mankind were especially terrible blood-shedders. (260)

The colossal act of ego that allows Raskolnikov to place himself alongside such world-historical figures as Napoleon is a key marker of the impact of Western individualist ideas on his psyche, and the ultimate contrast between the debased nature of his actions and the world-changing actions of great leaders is clearly intended by Dostoevsky as a statement against individualism. One might also couch this same statement as a critique of the key bourgeois concept of “freedom,” which Richard Avramenko sees as a key concept for Dostoevsky as well, except that *Crime and Punishment*, for Avramenko, espouses a “freedom from this freedom” (160). Still Avramenko grants that Dostoevsky’s early (pre-1849 arrest) work supported a more conventionally bourgeois notion of freedom, and one could argue that the representation of freedom even in *Crime and Punishment* is actually dialogic, pitting each of these forms of freedom against the other. In any case, one of Dostoevsky’s central statements against bourgeois

ideology in *Crime and Punishment* resides in his representation of Raskolnikov's vision of himself as a great man who is free to ignore the rules of society because those rules are designed to govern lesser individuals than he. The ridiculousness of this vision makes a mockery of individualism in general, while the suggestion that individualist egotism might lead to lawlessness and social chaos provides a warning against the potential negative consequences of individualist ideas, which for Dostoevsky clearly threaten to bring down the entire social fabric into a dog-eat-dog miasma of each against all.

In a society that does not offer equal opportunities to all, where money in particular is not distributed fairly, Raskolnikov considers himself an intellectual and reasons that this status somehow places him above the traditional laws of religion and institutions, given that those laws have not offered fair treatment: "I simply hinted that an 'extraordinary' man has the right . . . that is not an official right, but an inner right to decide in his own conscience to overstep . . . certain obstacles, and only in case it is essential for that practical fulfillment of his idea (sometimes, perhaps, of benefit to the whole of humanity)" (302, ellipsis in original). He declares, appealing to Western scientific heroes to construct his argument, that

If, as the result of certain combinations, Kepler's or Newton's discoveries could become known to people in no other way than by sacrificing the lives of one, or ten, or a hundred or more people who were hindering the discovery or standing as an obstacle in its path, then Newton would have the right, and it would even be his duty . . . to *remove* those ten or a hundred people, in order to make his discoveries known to all mankind. It by no means follows from this, incidentally, that Newton should have the right to kill anyone he pleases, whomever happens along, or to steal from the market every day. (259, ellipsis and emphasis in original)

According to Raskolnikov, the pawnbroker contributed nothing to society; indeed, she did a great deal of harm by preying on the poor by giving them less money than the value of what they pawned. Thus Raskolnikov performs a calculation that is reminiscent of the "good-of-

the-many-outweighs-the good-of-the few” ethos of English Utilitarianism.⁶ He sees himself as having done a service to the world by killing her, feeling that many far more worthy individuals might ultimately benefit from the death of this single, worthless woman. He believes that his intellectual superiority makes him above morality and law: “The old woman was merely a sickness. ... I was in a hurry to step over. ... It wasn’t a human being I killed, it was a principle! So I killed the principle, but I didn’t step over, I stayed on this side. ... All I managed to do was kill” (274, ellipses in original).

Granted, Raskolnikov would seem to contradict himself with this calculation, just as Utilitarianism was already itself seemingly contradictory with its apparent rejection of individualism in the statistical preference of the many over the one. This contradiction is partly real, partly based in the fact that bourgeois individualism is largely bogus to begin with, capitalism being designed to exploit individuals by giving them a false sense of their own importance and autonomy within the capitalist system. Indeed, virtually every aspect of capitalism is similarly contradictory, which is why Marx realized that only a dialectical analysis could ever hope to comprehend its complexities. In the case of Dostoevsky, the contradictory nature of Raskolnikov’s views on individualism serves as a similar demonstration of the inherent flaws in individualist thinking, which, despite its seeming reliance on rationalist thinking, ultimately leads to a variety of logical contradictions.

In nineteenth-century Russia, of course, the situation was even more complex. In particular, the inherently contradictory nature of bourgeois ideology was there exacerbated by the fact that bourgeois ideology itself was not a dominant, but was instead merely one part of a complex and contradictory ideological matrix that included strong elements of bourgeois thought mixed with even stronger remnants of traditional medieval religious ideology, while more radical

forms of socialist and anarchist thought (represented most prominently by thinkers such as Mikhail Bakunin) were beginning to exert an increasing influence as well. Little wonder, then, that Raskolnikov's attitudes are contradictory or that he vacillates between haughtily thinking of himself as a new Napoleon, turning his *ressentiment* toward others and viewing himself as the lowliest of vermin. At one point, disgusted with himself (and turning his *ressentiment* inward), he repeatedly tells Sonia Semyonovna Marmeladova (the pure-hearted prostitute who is perhaps the least contradicted of the novel's various characters, despite the fact that her professional activity contrasts so strongly with the clarity of her religious conviction) that he is a "louse" (274).

Sonia's self-sacrifice and Christian devotion would seem to epitomize the disavowal of bourgeois individualism that seems to be a big part of Dostoevsky's message in *Crime and Punishment*. Her example, indeed, provides an important part of the inspiration that turns Raskolnikov away from bourgeois individualist pride and toward Christian self-denial. Sonia has been reduced to prostitution to save her family from the poverty that has come through the utter ineptitude of her father, but she feels no shame because she knows that she has done what she has done in order to help others. As Raskolnikov muses, most probably her shiftless father "wept a bit and got accustomed" (27). While Gaskell suggests in *Mary Barton*, through the character of Esther, that immoral behavior like prostitution cannot be forgiven and that a fallen woman cannot be redeemed—Dostoevsky suggests through Sonia's character that redemption is always possible regardless of the sin committed, especially if it has been committed for a good reason. Although Sonia's physical body is contaminated with sin, her spiritual connection with God remains strong and is eventually what saves Raskolnikov. Many critics suggest that had it not

been for Sonia, Raskolnikov, tormented by guilt to the extent that he is, would have been driven to commit suicide in the wake of his crimes against the pawnbroker.

The diverse nature of the list of leaders cited by Raskolnikov as “criminals” who broke the laws of an old order in order to bring about a new one makes this critique of individualism (and of Raskolnikov’s inflated individualist sense of his own importance) quite general, but it is significant that the bourgeois leader Napoleon plays a particularly large role in the novel.

Napoleon is a particular hero of Raskolnikov, mentioned far more often than any of the others in this list. He is referred to at thirteen different points in the novel, for example, while the religious leader Muhammad is mentioned only three times. Indeed, after he confesses his crimes to Sonia, Raskolnikov openly admits that he became a criminal as part of a quest to become a great man in the mold of Napoleon: “I wanted to become a Napoleon, that’s why I killed” (415). Further, Raskolnikov goes on to attempt to argue that his own failure to achieve greatness may have come about because his context was simply too debased to allow such an achievement, rather than because he himself was simply not up to the task:

“How would it have been if Napoleon, for example, had happened to be in my place, and didn’t have Toulon, or Egypt, or the crossing of Mont Blanc to start his career, but, instead of all these beautiful and monumental things, had quite simply been some ridiculous old crone, a leginstrar’s widow, whom on top of that he had to kill in order to filch money from her trunk?” (415)

Napoleon, of course, is the perfect focus for such ruminations, partly because of his special place in Russian history and partly because of the central role he played in the bourgeois cultural revolution in Western Europe, his armies sweeping across the continent and leaving behind deposits of bourgeois ideology in their wake, before breaking down in the face of the heroic Russian resistance (and the beginnings of the grueling Russian winter) in 1812. In short, Napoleon serves as a reminder of the literal invasion of Russia by the West, but also as a

symbolic marker of the contaminating invasion of Mother Russia by Western bourgeois ideas. As Porfiry Petrovitch sardonically notes, discussing with Raskolnikov the possibility that the old pawnbroker might have been murdered by an aspiring Napoleon, while at the same time expressing his own contempt for the individualist arrogance that he associates with the great French military and political leader, ““But, my goodness, who in our Russia nowadays doesn’t consider himself a Napoleon?”” (265).

Dostoevsky certainly understood Napoleon’s near-allegorical significance as an icon of bourgeois power. As V. Yermilov notes,

Dostoyevsky saw Napoleon in two aspects simultaneously: one was the embodiment of the bourgeois-individualistic everything-is-permitted-me attitude; the other, in a patriarchal and at the same time petty-bourgeois sense, the symbol of godlessness and revolt against tradition. (194)

Of course, Dostoevsky also well understood that Napoleon’s ultimate defeat in Russia (a defeat that eventually led to the unraveling of his entire empire) also made him a symbol of the ability of Mother Russia to resist bourgeois power. It is clear, then, that Dostoevsky not only mocks the presumptuousness of Raskolnikov’s comparison of himself with Napoleon but also sees Napoleon as a negative role model in the first place. Raskolnikov might have failed to become a “great” man in the fashion of Napoleon, but that very failure is a key to the ultimate move toward humility that offers him a chance for final salvation.

Interestingly, the key to his salvation resides in his relationship with Sonia, whose self-sacrifice and purity provide an inspiration for Raskolnikov to give up his grandiose visions of personal greatness, passing through a period of self-disgust and eventually resolving to put aside his personal goals and *ressentiment* in favor of a devotion to some something larger and greater than himself. Here, though, in the book’s seemingly monological celebration of Raskolnikov’s turn from bourgeois *ressentiment* to Christian penance and salvation, Dostoevsky’s writing

remains resolutely dialogical. Any close reading of the book makes it clear that Raskolnikov's seeming rejection of egotism in favor of resignation to God is itself a highly egotistical gesture. Having failed to be a great criminal, he now resolves to be a great Christian.

Sonia, of course, is a very interesting choice as Raskolnikov's confessor and as the person who leads him away from his bourgeois tendencies because of her status as a prostitute, a status she has voluntarily undertaken because it is the only option available to her that will allow her to make enough money to help save her struggling family. The contrast between Sonia's moral purity and the sordid nature of her economic life serves, of course, as another of the novel's many images of such contrasts, all of which are ultimately versions of the book's central contrast between the moral strength of Russian Orthodoxy and the money-driven moral weakness of capitalist modernity. Meanwhile, as a prostitute she serves as a virtual embodiment of the commodification of human beings under capitalism, even as her spiritual purity makes her a paragon of Christian self-sacrifice. In her character, Dostoevsky combines his critique of capitalist materialism with his espousal of Christian spiritualism, the latter in her case presumably defeating the former in a rare case of a completely monological encounter between two ideologies in Dostoevsky. On the other hand, the very fact that her character lacks the dialogic richness that Bakhtin finds almost everywhere else in Dostoevsky's work makes her a somewhat wooden, even cartoonish figure who is made far less interesting (and convincing) by the completeness with which she has overcome the bourgeois tendencies that are threatening her Russian compatriots. Indeed, while her piety and Christian devotion are declared in the book to bring her happiness, she is a highly unconvincing character who few readers would wish to emulate. Thus, the complete silencing of bourgeois tendencies in her character is actually far less effective than the negative presentation of those tendencies in Raskolnikov, becoming

conspicuous in its absence while serving as an inadvertent suggestion that a complete disavowal of these tendencies requires a sacrifice that few would be willing to make.

In any case, Sonia's story provides the most obvious of the many rejections in *Crime and Punishment* of what Dostoevsky sees as the economic basis of virtually every human activity under capitalism, a rejection that again recalls the work of Balzac.⁷ On the other hand, just as Balzac's denunciation of capitalism is accompanied by a grudging recognition of the inevitability of its historical victory in nineteenth-century France, it is rather striking in *Crime and Punishment* how thoroughly focused on economic concerns are almost all of the motifs in the novel.⁸ No doubt this aspect of the novel can be taken as Dostoevsky's critique of the extent to which capitalist greed has already infected Russian life. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of how great this extent really is can be taken as an acceptance that capitalism was already a powerful force in nineteenth-century Russia. Dostoevsky may be revolted by the idea of letting one's life be driven by money, but he knows full well the necessity of acquiring a certain minimum level of economic resources in order to stay alive at all.

It may be telling that *Crime and Punishment* is such an urban novel, despite the fact that Russian society was still agrarian and that most Russians still lived on rural estates⁹. As with Gaskell and Manchester or Dickens and Coketown (or, more commonly and centrally, London), Dostoevsky chooses to set his novel in a major city, St. Petersburg, which is not only the imperial capital, but doubtless the one place in Russia where bourgeois ideas were strongest. Most of the action takes place in a poor part of town, focusing on the lives of the economically underprivileged. Against this backdrop of poverty, in which characters such as Raskolnikov live in miserable social conditions that exist in the most dreadful atmosphere, is the wealth of this city, with its concentration of aristocrats. St. Petersburg, in fact, is usually thought of as a

fashionable place of beautiful buildings and art, but the city was also marked by intolerable living conditions for the less fortunate, in which category almost all of the characters in the novel are firmly situated. Dostoevsky provides very specific and detailed descriptions of tenant rooms, sights, and smells, using his famous psychological insight to go beyond physical descriptions to indicate how these conditions affect the mental health of his characters. Dostoevsky particularly calls attention to the way in which these dire physical conditions trigger psychological revulsion on the part of the characters against the oppressive environment in which they live.

This revulsion, in the case of a thoughtful character such as Raskolnikov, leads directly to *ressentiment* against those who live in better conditions, often profiting directly from the misery of the poor. The former student Raskolnikov lives holed up, largely in seclusion, in the revolting environment of a filthy attic where the “décor” includes items that accentuate the frustration of his former dreams of becoming a scholar, including “a painted table in the corner, on which lay several books and notebooks (from the mere fact that they were so covered with dust, one could see that no hand had touched them for a long time)” (27). In this oppressive setting, Raskolnikov’s central emotion is repeatedly described as “loathing,” which can be interpreted as directed at both his environment and himself, but also at those who live in much better conditions. Upon seeing Raskolnikov’s room, his mother, Pulcheria Alexandrovna, says, “What an awful apartment you have, Rodya; like a coffin, . . . I’m sure it’s half on account of this apartment that you’ve become so melancholic” (231).

In his squalid room, Raskolnikov concocts his detailed plans for the pawnbroker’s murder that is the center of the novel’s plot, using a “scientific” approach easily identifiable as that of a Westernized intellectual. The contrast between his seemingly modern approach and the sordid nature of his plans is accentuated by the fact that the room itself is clearly not a place

well-suited for cultivating intellectual thought; it is rather a place that squeezes people into something smaller than themselves, limiting their creativity and imagination. His repulsive, claustrophobic room is, in a sense, a microcosm of the crowded, poor side of St. Petersburg, the only items setting it apart from the environment of most of the city's poor being the books that serve more as a reminder of Raskolnikov's failed past than of any future potential. In fact, they have been untouched for years.

One major difference between the English and the Russian cultures of the nineteenth century is the predominance of Russian Orthodoxy and the church's influence on the society, while English society of the period was extremely secular: its Protestant religion was, as Max Weber has so influentially argued of Protestantism in general, largely devoid of moral or supernatural content but was instead merely a spiritual prop for capitalism. However, the emergent Russian (realist) literature of the nineteenth century contains numerous characters who express some uncertainty and skepticism about faith. Even Dostoevsky, loyal religionist that he was, included numerous such characters in his work, perhaps most famously the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). It is, in fact, clear from Dostoevsky's entire body of work that he views capitalist modernization not merely as a threat, but as a very serious threat to the moral fabric of traditionalist Russia. Every aspect of Russian society seems, in *Crime and Punishment*, to have been penetrated by bourgeois thinking, and—with the exception of nearly allegorical figures such as Sonia—even the most religious characters in the novel seem to entertain certain doubts about their own beliefs.

For example, Katerina Ivanovna, Sonia's stepmother, expresses skepticism toward God in the light of the misfortunes that have been heaped upon her family. “‘Lord!’ [Katerina] suddenly cried, her eyes flashing, ‘is there really no justice? Who else are you going

to protect if not us orphans?’” (405). This quotation mirrors the sentiments of Carlyle and Gaskell: that poor people need to be governed and protected—if not by a higher power, then by those with higher moral standards and more social and political power. This quote also provides a reminder that justice is lacking, at least in the material world; as long as the universe continues to operate with indifference towards the poor, they will continue to view the world from a negative perspective that might cause them to reject the standards of that world or even to commit crime.

Nineteenth-century Russia was undoubtedly a society in crisis, and one of the key aspects of this crisis was the high rate of crime that prevailed, especially in the urban areas, despite the famously repressive nature of official authority in imperial Russia. Crime was in fact one of the dominant problems in Russia at the time *Crime and Punishment* was written, a situation of which Dostoevsky shows a strong awareness in his construction of the novel. Drunkenness and prostitution were particularly common, and the enormous gap between the middle class and the poor created a situation that invited economic crimes.

Dostoevsky and Gaskell both propose that poverty is a crucial breeding ground for mental instability and crime. Dostoevsky makes quite clear in the beginning of *Crime and Punishment* that Raskolnikov’s alienation, bitterness, and resentment are primarily due to his economic circumstances, even though he himself tries to deny it: “He was so immersed in himself and had isolated himself so much from everyone that he was afraid not only of meeting his landlady but of meeting anyone at all. He was crushed by poverty, but even his strained circumstances had lately ceased to burden him” (3). It is clear, though, that, like the crime of Gaskell’s protagonist John Barton, Raskolnikov’s crime is driven by poverty. In addition to the fact that his resentment of the pawnbroker is driven by economic jealousy, it is important to

mention that when Raskolnikov commits the woman's murder he is feeling lightheaded, as he has not eaten in two days because he cannot afford food. Raskolnikov makes the decision to murder while starving and going through the most debasing conditions. Dostoevsky, through Raskolnikov, explores the question of the crime of principle and whether crime can be justified given the social, physical, and psychological condition of the murderer.

Also like John Barton, Raskolnikov justifies the murder of one person and views it as less harmful than the social murder committed by the rich of hundreds and thousands of poor people on a daily basis. Thus, he replaces morality with statistics, performing a cold calculation that ignores the human reality of individual suffering and showing the Westernized, scientific nature of his thinking. After committing the murder, which is exacerbated by the fact that the pawnbroker's sister happens on the scene, causing a panicked Raskolnikov to murder her as well, Raskolnikov awakens feeling restless and angrily looks around his tiny, shabby room; he then buries the meager loot that he has stolen and ultimately does nothing good with it, despite his formerly grandiose plans to use it to fight injustice. He decides that his guilt stems from his discovery that he was the wrong person to do the killing—not from the fact that the murder was itself unjustified.

Later, Raskolnikov becomes unable to cope with the burden of his crime, and the internal psychological conflict he undergoes after committing the murder becomes the main focus of the novel. Burdened by guilt, he contemplates attempting to rid himself from the guilt by confessing the crime. This contemplated confession is at least as metaphysical as it is legal, and at first Raskolnikov confesses only to Sonia, while denying any involvement in the murder when he is accused by the police detective Porfiry. Confession, of course, is a key sacrament of the Russian Orthodox Church, which (like the Roman Catholic Church) places much emphasis on the

importance of confession as an element of repentance leading to salvation. Still, however surrounded by religious resonances this potential confession might be, it should also be noted that, according to Foucault, an urge to confess one's transgressions is a key to the voluntary acquiescence that makes the exercise of power in carceral (i.e., modern bourgeois) societies so efficient.

As Foucault notes in *Discipline and Punish*, extracting a confession was crucial to the largely religious-oriented exercise of power in medieval Europe; however, he goes on to argue in the introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality* that confession has remained a key manner in which modern knowledge-oriented authority asserted its power over the accused as well. Thus, "the confession became one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth" (*History* 59). Further, Foucault might be describing *Crime and Punishment* when he notes that this turn is reflected in a transformation of Western literature into a more modern (i.e., realist) vein that is "ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage" (59).

Indeed, the coercive nature of medieval confessions, as opposed to the presumably voluntary nature of modern ones, functions for Foucault as a kind of localized image of the more general difference between the repressive power of the Middle Ages and the productive power of the modern era. In *Discipline and Punish*, he argues that, in the Middle Ages, "the only way in which the truth might exert all its power, was for the criminal to accept responsibility for his own crime and himself sign what had been skillfully and obscurely constructed by the preliminary investigation" (38). In this declaration, we can see a clear echo of Porfiry's claim in *Crime and Punishment* that he is not interested in proving criminals guilty, but only in convincing them to

accept and declare their own guilt. Porfiry notes that a punishment imposed on a criminal is not effective if the criminal himself rejects his own guilt: “It’s a matter of justice. So, go and do what justice demands. I know you don’t believe it, but, by God, life will carry you. And then you’ll get to like it. All you need is air now—air, air!” (460). Porfiry suggests that Raskolnikov is suffocating from his sins and that he will only be able to regain his breath through a redemption that must begin with confession and acceptance of responsibility.

Raskolnikov does not immediately respond to Porfiry’s demand for a confession (which is driven by religious concerns), but still feels a more modern urge to confess, even as he also experiences a continual Panoptic sense of being observed and suspected by everyone. In short, Raskolnikov is driven by contradictory urges to reveal and to conceal his crimes, just as his famed guilt clearly involves a combination of medieval religious elements and modern disciplinary ones, mirroring the complex ideological climate of a nineteenth-century Russia that is still clinging to the Middle Ages with one hand while grasping toward modernity with the other. It is not for nothing that Raskolnikov’s very name means “schism” in Russian, indicating the split nature of his inclinations.

Ultimately, Raskolnikov gives in to the urge to confess, in a mode that Dostoevsky clearly seeks to present as a moment of religious redemption and of rejection of modern secular rationalism. Kneeling down in the middle of the square and kissing the earth, which holds the religious significance of resurrection, Raskolnikov publically declares his guilt, which leads him gladly to accept his sentence to a penal colony on Siberia, where he can do penance for his crimes.

Thus, in *Crime and Punishment* (as in most of Dostoevsky’s work), religious orthodoxy ostensibly prevails over capitalist modernization. But (as Marx and Engels so memorably point

out in *The Communist Manifesto*), capitalism has historically proved a difficult opponent to defeat, typically rolling over all opposition like a juggernaut. The fact that bourgeois ideas play so many prominent roles in the novel suggests the difficulty of silencing bourgeois ideology. Indeed, the fact that Dostoevsky does *not* succeed in silencing this ideology is one of the keys to the dialogism/polyphony that Bakhtin has so famously championed in Dostoevsky's work, even if Bakhtin expresses this fact differently. That the same can be said for Gogol, though, suggests that this tendency is not unique to Dostoevsky but is quite general, especially in realist narratives, which provide a perfect environment for bourgeois ideology to thrive.

The works of Dostoevsky and Gogol differ from those of Dickens and Gaskell because of their very different historical contexts. The presence of bourgeois ideology in the Russian texts suggests a progressive tendency that challenges the conservative orientations of the writers, while the presence of this same ideology in the English texts suggests a conservative tendency that limits the ability of the writers to espouse genuinely progressive ideas. In both cases, though, bourgeois ideology stands opposed to what the ostensible utopian visions of the texts. On the other hand, this situation also works in the other direction, and nineteenth-century realist fiction from both England and Russia, sometimes shows a surprising utopian potential that stands in contrast to the seemingly bleak visions presented in the texts. I will explore this side of realist fiction in the next two chapters.

Notes

¹ Moretti notes, however, that money itself (that key emblem of the presence of the bourgeoisie) was already becoming a major factor in nineteenth-century Russian society and in the literature it produced. He thus notes that, in the Petersburg of *Crime and Punishment*, “having money is (at least) as decisive as in Dickens’s London or Zola’s Paris” (165).

² See Futrell for an argument concerning the relationship between Dickens and Gogol. Among other things, Futrell notes that Gogol was often criticized in Russia for his similarity to Dickens, who was regarded by traditionalists as vulgar. Belinsky, on the other hand, defended both Dickens and Gogol against these attacks.

³ Alissandratos takes a different tack on the religious intonations in the story, noting Gogol’s use of the hagiographic tradition, but also noting the contrast “juxtaposes the sacred commonplaces of the encomiastic narrative pattern with his profane realization of them” (24). For this reason, Alissandratos concludes that Gogol offers a “subversive critique of the hagiographic tradition” (39). This critique, of course, can be taken as a further sign of the encroachment of bourgeois ideology into Gogol’s text.

⁴ Gogol himself might have sensed this pull late in his career when he eschewed the writing of fiction, concluding that his fiction had been inspired by demonic forces. Working before Marx, he apparently lacked the theoretical framework within which to identify those forces as bourgeois ideology.

⁵ See Kliger for an argument that the famed richness of Dostoevsky’s writing can be largely attributed to his appreciation of the complex and multiple nature of the historical forces underlying nineteenth-century Russia. For Kliger, *Crime and Punishment*, in particular is, “a thought experiment exploring the emerging condition of multi-historicity—that is, a simultaneity of multiple emplotment possibilities for the Russian nation” (228).

⁶ Habib notes that Utilitarianism is, in fact, one of the several modes of Western rationalist thought that are identified in *Crime and Punishment* as being influential on Raskolnikov’s thinking.

⁷ Lukács has noted the clear link between Dostoevsky and Balzac in this and other respects, calling Raskolnikov the “Rastignac of the late nineteenth century” and noting that Dostoevsky was clearly familiar with and influenced by Balzac’s work (*Marxism* 181). The ambitious Rastignac, who appears in several of Balzac’s novels (especially *La Père Goriot* in 1835), is one of that author’s key images of the way in which economic striving under capitalism leads to moral debasement.

⁸ For a discussion of this economic emphasis, see James, Briggs, and James, though their analysis simply emphasizes the extent to which *Crime and Punishment* can be read as a critique of capitalism and its impact in nineteenth-century Russia.

Their discussion, however, does not appreciate the extent to which the novel is itself informed by the bourgeois ideology that informed this capitalism. They are also particularly positive in their reading of Raskolnikov as a largely admirable character who takes action against capitalism and its immorality.

⁹ Note that Lukács calls Dostoevsky “the first and greatest poet of the modern capitalist metropolis” (*Marxism* 189).

Chapter Four

Imagine All the People: The Utopian Optimism of Thomas Hardy

in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Jude the Obscure*

Raymond Williams has argued that the difficulties of the individual in attaining upward mobility in the face of strong structures and institutions that act to limit that mobility is one of the great preoccupations of nineteenth-century European literature. He notes that, in Victorian English literature, the outcome of this confrontation is generally a conservative affirmation of the institutions. He grants, however, that Hardy's characters at least make the effort to protest against the limitations placed on them by these institutions, but concludes that, in works such as *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy ultimately declares "the very effort hopeless" (*Long Revolution* 244). Coming from a Marxist critic such as Williams, this declaration of Hardy's hopelessness might sound like a condemnation, but in fact this vision of Hardy as a hopeless pessimist is a fairly conventional one, and his novels are widely regarded as among the most depressing works in the canon of nineteenth-century British literature. Indeed, Williams actually comes more often to praise Hardy than to bury him, viewing Hardy in *The Country and the City* essentially as the culmination of a long arc in British literature that traces the gradual replacement of rural by urban life as the most important setting not only for that literature but for British life as a whole.

In point of fact, Williams's vision of Hardy as announcing the impossibility of the triumph of individual desire over social demand in a sense makes Hardy the culmination of another important trend in nineteenth-century British literature as well. Focusing specifically on the bildungsroman (the genre *par excellence* of confrontations between the individual and the social), Franco Moretti has argued that the nineteenth-century British bildungsroman as a whole

is quite conservative (to the point of being rather uninteresting) in its consistent definition of a successful conclusion of the growing-up process simply as learning the rules and learning to follow them in such a way that one can fit into the system and prosper within it precisely by not attempting to change it or overcome it. This focus, for Moretti, has to do with the particularly stable nature of English society in the nineteenth century—and also with the particularly entrenched nature there of a formerly revolutionary bourgeois class that has now become stodgy and unimaginative, clinging to the status quo instead of challenging it. “In France, or in Dostoevsky,” notes Moretti, the bourgeois class identifies itself with mobility and change, while “in England it is the champion of the opposite values: security, stability, transparency” (*Way* 200).

There are, then, all sorts of reasons why the characterization of Hardy as pessimistic about the ability of individuals to make their own history, whether they choose the conditions or not, makes perfect sense and is entirely unsurprising. And there is, no doubt, a lot to be said for this view of Hardy and his novels, which many critics have compared with Greek drama, the downward arcs in the life stories of characters such as Michael Henchard and Jude Fawley having much of the inevitability of classic Greek tragedy.¹ I would, however, very much like to contest this view of Hardy and his novels. For one thing, however pessimistic they might be about upward mobility in most ways, Hardy’s novels (which Moretti does not mention in his study of the *bildungsroman*) focus on a rural England that is itself still in the process of transformation from the traditional to the modern, lending them an oddly (given their seemingly eulogistic nature) dynamic quality that differs fundamentally from Moretti’s vision of the conservative nineteenth-century English *bildungsroman*. Hardy is, one might say, a modern

novelist whose novels happen to be set in a world still clinging to the traditional, though its grip on the old is slipping away into memory.

Noting Hardy's essential modernity, Williams acknowledges the vividness with which Hardy chronicles the landscape of traditional rural England, but also declares that, in Hardy, this traditional landscape is always in the process of becoming a thing of the past. Hardy's rural England, says Williams, is "old in custom and in memory, but old also in the sense that belongs to the new times of conscious education, the oldness of history and indeed of prehistory: the educated consciousness of the facts of change" (*Country* 197). For Williams, Hardy is a novelist primarily of change: "Within the major novels, in several ways, the experiences of change and of the difficulty of choice are central and even decisive" (197). Hardy's world is a world in transition, even as he centers his exploration of that transition in "the ordinary processes of life and work," in the prosaic, day-to-day events that are crucial to change in the lives of individuals but that seldom feature in the history books as the focal point for narratives of change in a broader sense of sweeping societal transformation (*Country* 211).

Despite their settings, though, and whatever else they might be, Hardy's novels are stubbornly modern works and their protagonists are entirely modern individuals, distinct in their characterization and entirely lacking in the allegorical trans-individualism of characters such as Oedipus or Medea. Indeed, Hardy's novels are so modern that they also go well beyond the determinism of contemporary works such as the naturalist novels then current in France and beginning to be so in the United States. If anything, any tendency toward seemingly inevitable tragedy in Hardy's novels has less in common with the inexorable fate of Greek tragedy or the scientific determinism of French naturalism than with the later works of American film noir—

Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1947) is a good example—or even neo-noir, as in David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* (2005).

The difficulty of choice that Williams points to in Hardy is, of course, a crucial theme of modern culture. Noir heroes, for example, often find that dark material from their past choices has set them on a narrative course that they find difficult to escape. However, this dark matter is virtually always a matter of their own bad decisions or wrong actions and is certainly not a matter of fate or pre-ordained tragedy. Moreover, escape is generally *only* difficult and unlikely—not necessarily impossible. In *A History of Violence*, for example, protagonist Tom Stall (played by Viggo Mortensen) attempts to go straight but finds it difficult to escape his violent, criminal past when his former associates show up years later to disrupt his newly respectable middle-class life. Yet he does triumph in the end—if only by returning, temporarily, to the violent ways of his past. As Marx repeatedly insisted, men make their own history, though not under conditions of their own choosing. Or, as Sartre puts it (expressing an existentialist position no doubt influenced by Marx), although man lives in a social reality, that reality does not determine his life; man should live an authentic life and create his essence as he moves forward in time: “Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards” (Sartre 6).

In this sense, the worldview of noir narratives is rather existentialist, suggesting a narrative of human life in which individuals find themselves adrift in a world without fundamental metaphysical meaning—which can either leave them lost in lives of quiet desperation or offer them liberating possibilities to move forward and to make their own meaning, however provisional it might be.² *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) is probably the Hardy novel that most directly anticipates this feature of film noir. Subtitled “The Life and Death

of a Man of Character,” the novel in both its title and subtitle (however ironic or enigmatic) emphasizes its own focus on a single protagonist, Michael Henchard—though the title is eventually ironized when another character assumes the role of mayor late in the book. Granted, the novel has a strong social dimension and includes Hardy’s typically effective evocation of a rural community, but this focus on the story of a relatively ordinary individual such as Henchard marks *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as a work informed by the bourgeois imagination. By concentrating on the protagonist’s story (which is driven by Henchard’s own choices), Hardy accentuates a consciousness of the existential perspective of human life and is concerned with exploring the condition of human existence, associated with feelings of estrangement and alienation as part of living in a hostile universe—but hostile more in a social sense than in a metaphysical one.

The character of Henchard has usually been regarded as a victim of fate and his own tragic flaws—a man whose innate shortcomings combine with his fate to cause his ruin. Henchard has the traits of bad temper and the inability of self-control. If he becomes desperate, jealous, or angry, he will immediately act on impulses that are often self-destructive. This idea suggests that his mistakes are a result of his personality flaws, which he was born with and cannot control. My outlook from an existential perspective defies this idea, because one’s essence is created after his existence. Henchard has the free will to act differently at all moments or to amend his past and to shape his future. “Man’s relation with being is that he can modify it” (Sartre, *Being* 24). I take it that Henchard is a man who is trying to assert his subjective authenticity; however, he fails because of his own free actions, which will naturally have consequences. Different actions, which he might well have taken had he simply chosen to do so, might have led to different consequences.

Most of the events of the novel are either directly related to or strongly informed by a series of bad decisions made by Henchard in his youth, beginning with his irresponsible decision (while an unemployed hay-trusser at the beginning of the 1830s) to marry at a young age. This initial decision quickly leads to the birth of a child and to Henchard's growing sense of entrapment and despair as a result of the consequences of his initial decision to marry. He then attempts to escape the consequences of his earlier decision by turning to drink, leading to a key moment in which a drunken Henchard argues at a fair with his wife Susan, then auctions off his wife and baby daughter Elizabeth-Jane, who are bought for five guineas by a sailor named Newson. Newson then departs with his new "possessions" immediately after buying them, taking them away with him on his journeys, which quickly takes them out of the reach of Henchard when he subsequently makes a rather half-hearted effort to locate them.

Henchard himself justifies the transaction in which he sells his wife and infant daughter, attempting to explain the act in a flourish of objectification and commodification, envisioning his family members as being like little more than livestock that can be bought and sold like any other commodity. After all, the fair at which he sells his wife and child is in fact devotedly primarily to the buying and selling of precisely such livestock:

"I did for myself that way thoroughly," said the trusser, with a contemplative bitterness that was well-nigh resentful. "I married at eighteen, like the fool that I was, and this is the consequence o't." ... "For my part I don't see why men who have got wives and don't want 'em, shouldn't get rid of 'em as these gypsy fellows do their old horses." (8, 9, ellipsis mine).

This quote reveals Henchard's struggles in this alienated world, as he searches for self-realization through his own series of wrong choices and activities. Each of his bad choices might seem to be driven by his previous bad choices, but the sequence is not inexorable. More like Brecht's *Mother Courage* than Sophocles' *Oedipus*, he keeps doing the wrong thing not because

it is his fate to do so, or because of his undaunting determination to stick to his original plan, but because he simply fails to learn from his past mistakes and thereby continues to compound them, one after another. This corresponds with the view of trying to find the authentic self in existentialism, a process the success of which is by no means either easy or assured, but which is at least open as a possibility.

In the above quote, Henchard fully realizes that he himself made the choice of marrying young, that he could have done otherwise, and that his action has a consequence, which is a severe limitation to his options in life moving forward, especially professionally. Of course, in selling his wife and child, Henchard is attempting to cancel the irresponsible act of marrying young (when he was unable to support a family) with the even more irresponsible act of selling his wife and child. By doing so, he shatters his family unit in a way that can surely be read as allegorical of the historical process itself and of the breakdown of traditional rural society that is so central to Hardy's fiction as a whole³. After all, in realist fiction, the family quite often functions, as Jameson notes of the novels of Balzac as "the figure of society" (*Political* 173). Social discord and unrest will thus naturally lead in such fiction to the depiction of the unsettled, unhappy families so memorably evoked by Tolstoy in the often-quoted opening passage of *Anna Karenina* (1878).

Henchard's own decisions and acts, though, are what define him as an irresponsible person: irresponsibility is not some sort of tragic flaw that the gods (or human nature) have thrust upon him. Even Victorian society cannot fully be blamed for his character, though it certainly helps to set the conditions under which Henchard is able to make his own history. The very next morning after selling his wife and child, a sobered-up Henchard realizes what he has done, yet he still refuses to accept responsibility and instead puts the blame on his wife: "Yet she knew I am

not in my senses when I do that. ... why didn't she know better than bring me into this disgrace!" (17). Granted, he then sets out to find his wife and daughter to evade the shame and to restore his family, but he never finds them; thus, he decides he must "put up with the shame as best he could. It was of his own making, and he ought to bear it (17).

He apparently bears it well, swearing off alcohol and going on to build a successful career as a corn and hay merchant, a career that enables him eventually to rise in prominence and respectability to become the mayor of the town of Casterbridge, as well as the leading citizen of the entire region. He is a respectable businessman who has risen from humble origins to make an impressive life for himself, even if it is a life with severe limitations. He is, after all, a man of limited imagination who has essentially run up against his career ceiling: to go farther in life would require creative and innovative thinking of a kind that he appears unable to pursue. Indeed, times are already seeming to begin to pass him by.

Henchard also soothes his conscience by convincing himself that Susan is probably dead after he fails to find her in his somewhat perfunctory search. Allowing the locals to believe that he is a widower (which, for all he knows, could well be true), Henchard never, of course, entirely forgets the transgressions of his past, which then come back to haunt him when Susan and a young woman who seems to be Elizabeth-Jane appear in Casterbridge nearly twenty years later and re-enter his life, bringing with them the shame of his past actions—as well as new disasters due to Henchard's inappropriate attempts to make restitution.

At the time of Susan's return, Henchard is on the verge of starting a new family in middle age by marrying Lucetta Templeman (aka Lucette Le Sueur). However, he sets that plan aside and instead remarries Susan, in what (reading the plot allegorically) can be taken as a desperate attempt to restore the conventional order and to do what he regards as the responsible thing.

History, of course, moves inexorably forward, so this restoration of the past (like all attempts to restore the French *ancien régime* in Balzac) is doomed to failure. Henchard, in many ways, serves as the allegorical carrier of the values of this doomed older order, pursuing his business and other aspects of his life in a conservative and traditional manner that is itself doomed to failure when it runs up against the more modern methods employed by rivals such as Donald Farfrae, Henchard's former protégé, who becomes (due to Henchard's own attitude) his principal antagonist in the novel, though Farfrae himself remains loyal to Henchard, the man who gave him his start in Casterbridge just as he himself was planning to move to America in search of the wide-open opportunities available there.

Hardy, like Balzac, realizes that history only moves forward and that certain historical processes cannot be opposed by the actions of mere individuals, whether they be the characters in novels or the novelists themselves. These large, sweeping processes, of which the overall arc of capitalist modernization is surely the central instance, provide the conditions under which individuals must build their lives. Having made certain mistakes in his youth, Henchard repeatedly compounds those mistakes by taking actions that go against the forward flow of history. These actions, though, are not themselves inevitable, and Henchard is perfectly free to act otherwise. Unfortunately, he does not take advantage of the freedom to develop in productive ways, partly because he confuses the idea of asserting his human existence with his social role as a businessman and local politician. He wants to develop this social role at the expense of his already established inter-subjective responsibility toward his wife and child. By trying to cancel them as if they have never existed, it is clear that he seeks to be free to become the person he feels he should be; however, his choices are led by self-deceit, his Being-for-itself is discarded the moment he chooses to overlook the factual element of his previous freely-made choice. It is

clear that Henchard initially got married willingly and freely, though of course the decision was made within a social fabric that values marriage as a social good; existential freedom is a characteristic of the nature of consciousness and is thus related to the limits of responsibilities one bears as a result of this freedom. However, social and physical constraints cannot be overlooked while making choices. Henchard sees his responsibilities towards his wife and child as human-defined responsibilities that people attempt to abide by; moreover, he believes that these practices are futile and that he does not have to abide by them. Henchard's anxiety is underlined with moral uncertainty, and denying his responsibility towards his wife and child is a way to moralize his immoral act. By initially asserting his unaccountability over the choice he made, Henchard is trapped in bad faith. Henchard created his own essence, but he was then unable to live in accordance with the self that he created. His acting was inauthentic; his act was based on another essence that was not his: "get rid of 'em as these gypsy fellows do their old horses." His adoption of false values subsequently leads to his inauthentic act that was not based in accordance with his own freedom, thus the upcoming consequences are not due to him being a victim of his self-destructive nature, which he cannot control, but are simply due to his own decisions in charting his course through life.

If one focuses on Henchard's lack of success in finding happiness, despite his achievements, it is easy to read *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as a pessimistic novel. However, if one focuses on the existential opportunities that were open to him, but that he did not choose to pursue, the novel becomes a story not of the unavailability of opportunities, but simply one of opportunities not taken. Moreover, if one reads Henchard as entrenched in old modes of thought that are being swept away by the ongoing process of history, it becomes clear that this novel contains a strong utopian dimension in the way it, again recalling the novels of Balzac, reflects

the reality of historical change. From a Marxist perspective, the simple acknowledgement of this reality has a strong utopian dimension: if historical change is possible, even inevitable, it is always possible that the world might be transformed in positive ways, even if it is also the case that this transformation might be a negative one, depending upon the actions of individuals working together in large enough collective groups to be powerful enough to become the agents of this historical change.

As Marx and Engels emphasize in *The Communist Manifesto*, the greatest agents of historical change up to the middle of the nineteenth century were the European bourgeoisie, whose daring, energetic, and ruthless actions swept away the ruling order of medieval Europe and issued in the era of capitalism. One of the key tools employed by the bourgeoisie in this effort was the realist novel, which reflected a rationalist view of the world that was congruent with bourgeois ideology, typically (at least until the mid-nineteenth century, when the genre began to turn conservative) featuring strong and dynamic individual protagonists who took arms against seas of trouble and by opposing ended them. In addition, the very arcs of the narrative plots of early realist novels mimicked a rationalist view of history as progress. By the time of the novels of Hardy, the protagonists, especially of the English novel, are no longer quite so capable of defeating the various forces that are arrayed against them, and the plots no longer necessarily proceed through the resolution of conflicts and the overcoming of difficulties toward the establishment of a better overall situation in which the characters as a whole can reside.⁴

However, despite this turn toward greater pessimism, the realist novel, as practiced by Hardy, is still the realist novel and still contains vestiges of the utopian energies that had driven the genre in its formative decades, when it served as the most important literary expression of the confidence and dynamism of the emergent bourgeoisie in Europe. Indeed, however trapped

Michael Henchard might appear to be trapped in his own chain reaction of bad decisions, it is clear that he lives in a world that is very much still in the process of dramatic historical change, despite the fact that bourgeois ideology had been dominant in England for two hundred years and despite the fact that the basic transformation that had swept away the world of feudal England, replacing it with the new world of rising capitalism, had taken place long ago.

The confrontation between Henchard and Farfrae can certainly be read as a simple confrontation between two very different men. Neither Henchard and Farfrae fully functions in the novel without the other, and to an extent they represent an example of the kind of paired characters for which late Victorian literature is so well known. Henchard seems to recognize this paired status when he first asks Farfrae to join him in his business, noting that Farfrae, figure of modernity that he is, is good at “science” and “figures,” as Henchard (whose main assets are the old-fashioned ones of strength and hard work) is not (51).

Of course, the purest (as well as the most spectacular and overt) example of these paired characters in late Victorian literature might be Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Even the Jekyll-Hyde opposition, which seems to allegorize so directly the conflict between the drives of the Freudian unconscious and the constraints placed on the ego by the demands of the superego, has a strong historical dimension, with Dr. Jekyll representing modernity and Mr. Hyde representing the primal urges of the dim past. In particular, Stevenson’s narrative is paradigmatic of the widespread fascination with the notion of “degeneration” that swept the popular imagination of late-Victorian England, as well as much of the rest of the Western world, at the end of the nineteenth century. Fueled by Herbert Spencer’s misapplication of Darwin’s theories of relativity to social situations, degeneration theory was essentially based on the notion that evolution, both biological and social, might proceed

backward as well as forward, and that advanced nations such as Victorian England (partly due to their contaminating contact with “primitive” societies such as the ones that were then rapidly being colonized in Africa) were in danger of reverting to a more undeveloped state, as were the individuals who populated those nations, as the degeneration of the ultra-civilized Jekyll into the brutish Hyde demonstrates.⁵

The popularity of the discourse of degeneration was part of a generally gloomy outlook that was widespread in late-nineteenth-century England. The 1890s were marked by a deep economic depression that led to high unemployment rates and that greatly exacerbated the already dismal living conditions of the working class.⁶ A century of explosive capitalist growth had led not to an ideal world fueled by universal affluence, but to a world of bad food, poor health, and inadequate housing for large elements of the English population, who were often, at the end of the century, living in conditions far worse than those documented by Engels in the 1840s. Indeed, among other things, Hardy’s fiction participates in a general sense of social crisis that produced such grim contemporaneous novels of urban poverty as George Gissing’s *The Nether World* (1889) and Arthur Morrison’s *A Child of the Jago* (1896).

Morrison’s novel especially suggests that poverty has dehumanizing effects that are reminiscent of the lurid visions of degeneration discourse, but there is surely also a touch of degeneration thinking in Hardy’s characterization of the opposition between Henchard and Farfrae, though this opposition is a complex and dialectical one. Henchard, is, for sure, no Hyde, but he is driven by regressive and sometimes primitive impulses, as opposed to the more modern and forward-thinking Farfrae. From the perspective of Sartrean existentialism, Henchard clings to ideas and structures thrust upon him by society. He thus accepts inherited limitations and fails to pursue the freedom of choice that is ultimately available to him, a pursuit at which the much

more flexible Farfrae is far more successful. Henchard's failure was due to his inability to separate himself from his social-role, or to regulate his relationships with the others in terms of inter-subjective relationships, and not as part of his own being. Throughout the years Henchard builds up his business, becoming one of the wealthiest people in Casterbridge as well as gaining prominence as the mayor of the town. Yet he remains trapped in his past, which becomes facticity that he never faces. As a result, Henchard never utilizes his ability and freedom to find the-Being-for-itself; he still operates under the Being-in-itself and is trapped in bad faith because he only operates under his desires which will only desire "objects" that are part of the external world. As he does not go through a valid confrontation between transcendence and facticity, he faces no moment of detachment from his surroundings of the kind that is crucial, from an existentialist perspective, to exploring the possibilities of one's own identity: "By uprooting himself from the world, man makes himself present to the world and makes the world present to him" (Beauvoir 12).

Henchard never reaches the consciousness that will allow him to shape and explore new values, rather than simply remaining mired in the ones with which he begins. The failure, though, is his own, and is certainly not the result of some sort of metaphysical doom. He remains static, like the traditional rural world from which he comes, and fails to achieve the dynamic, fluidity of the process of becoming that marks the modern subject as described by Sartre. Consciousness can conceive of a lack of being, but Being-for-itself is also the annihilation of Being-in-itself: "this intra-mundane nothingness cannot be produced by being-in-itself" (Sartre 23). To reach the moment of authenticity Henchard should face his facticity; by disregarding his facticity in the continual process of self-making, he projects himself into the future in denial and inauthenticity, depriving himself of the chance to develop and grow in new directions. He strives

for liberation and self-realization, and that makes him acutely aware of the existential dilemma; he also senses a conflict with the indifferent universe and experiences a state of alienation and estrangement. With all his business success and social status Henchard still feels alienated from his human environment, which is why he is so enthusiastic to get Farfrae to stay with him and to take Farfrae on as his assistant, for he has no real friends in the town. He tells the younger man: “But, damn it all, I am a lonely man, Farfrae: I have nobody else to speak to (59). Of course, Henchard comes to despise Farfrae, though the young man does nothing to deserve this attitude. Henchard, in fact, becomes increasingly bitter as the novel proceeds, displaying a *ressentiment* that might not quite match that of a Raskolnikov but that nevertheless becomes a central aspect of his attitude toward the world.

Later, when Henchard decides to remarry Susan after her return from “exile,” he fails, in Sartrean terms, to transcend the facticity of his situation, allowing previous decisions and pre-existing conditions to determine his life: he remains trapped in Being-in-itself, rather than Being-for-itself. In more conventionally Marxist terms, he fails to make his own history, because he confuses the conditions under which his history must be made with his history in itself. While complaining to Farfrae about his feelings of alienation he blames these feelings on his past, citing “those gloomy fits I sometimes suffer from on account o’ the loneliness of my domestic life, when the world seems to have the blackness of hell, and, like Job, I could curse the day that gave me birth (83). Henchard feels trapped in his past, but does not blame himself, he throws the blame on his own past for trapping him in such a condition. He thus seeks to avoid responsibility for his actions by attributing them to a cursed fate, thus anticipating generations of readers who would see his life story in the same way.

He marries his wife again by the reference to common values such as the notion that it is his duty to do so for the sake of his presumed daughter Elizabeth-Jane, instead of taking care of them both without marrying Susan, with whom he has no emotional connection whatsoever, beyond this sense of duty and guilt, which binds him and limits his future course of action: “He pressed on the preparations for his union, or rather re-union, with this pale creature in a dogged unflinching spirit which did credit to his conscientiousness (88). By seeing his marriage as a duty to make amends with his past, he fails to pay the proper attention to his future, avoiding making a difficult choice by essentially claiming that he has no choice and that there is only one right course to take, according to his fixed sense of duty: “I *ought* to do it—I ought to do it, indeed!” he declares (122).

Henchard fails to see that his past is not who he is, and that it only partly constitutes who he is at the present time; thus, he totally ignores the present reality of his being and fails to realize that by achieving his social duty toward his wife whom he does not really care for, he will not be able to achieve his own authenticity. Henchard never gives himself the chance to go through the phase of Sartrean nothingness, which cannot be achieved unless one builds consciousness of his own being. Henchard is stuck at Being-in-itself, which is regarded as “full of itself, and no more total plentitude can be imagined, no more perfect equivalence of content to container (Sartre, *Being* 74). He is unable to realize his freedom in his actions, Also his interactions with Elizabeth-Jane, Farfrae, and Lucetta show that he cannot live in intersubjective relation with people. Instead, he treats people as objects; his relations with them are only projected in the desire to have—to possess. Sartre proposes that the relation to the other is a relation of being; however, Henchard objectifies the other to affirm himself. This affirmation, though, is doomed to fail because he denies the other’s selfhood. “My relation to the Other is

first and fundamentally a relation of being to being” (Sartre, *Being* 244). Henchard thus loses the ability to define himself with others on inter-subjective terms. When he first meets Farfrae he immediately proclaims their friendship: “The face of Mr. Henchard beamed forth a satisfaction that was almost fierce in its strength. ‘Now you are my friend!’” he exclaimed” (68). Then he becomes jealous and hateful of Farfrae’s successful business, of Farfrae’s relationship with Lucetta, and then of Farfrae’s eventual marriage to the substitute Elizabeth-Jane. As a result of not being able to control Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard feels that she will be a disgrace to him. He both loves and hates with fierceness.

Henchard’s act of attempting to force Lucetta to marry him after Susan’s death depicts his need of recognition on his own of being, his understanding of the self is only conceived through his social role or through the others that he wants to possess⁷. Upon sabotaging his relationship with Elizabeth-Jane, by his own choice, Henchard “found himself again on the precise standing which he had occupied five-and-twenty years before. Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope. ... [b]ut the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum” (328, my ellipsis). Henchard thus decides that his life has been worthless, and he attempts to die with dignity and selflessness, leaving a will that reads:

MICHAEL HENCHARD’S WILL

“That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me.

“& that I nt bury’d in consecrated ground.

“& that no sexton be asked to toll the bell.

“& that nobody is wished to see my dead body.

“& that no murners walk behind me at my funeral.

“& that no flours be planted on my grave.

“& that no man remember me.

“To this I put my name.

Michael Henchard” (341)

Although his last action shows that Henchard is aware of all the wrong deeds he committed earlier in his life, and he decides to take responsibility by isolating himself from the people he harmed, the struggle of self-assertion remains the substance of his life experience. However, the kind of responsibilities he takes shows hopelessness, as he becomes aware that his nature and impulse are unchanged. He never displays a conscious existence; thus, he fails to find his free existence in the ongoing flow of time, the Being-for-itself.

Farfrae, on the other hand, is less bound by tradition and more willing to change his course in response to ongoing developments, allowing him a greater chance to achieve an authenticity of self in the existentialist sense. But it is also clear that the opposition between Henchard and Farfrae can be read, not simply as the realistic narrative of an encounter between two individuals, but also as a more general allegorical confrontation between opposed historical forces. In particular, the Henchard-Farfrae opposition can also be read allegorically as a confrontation between tradition and modernity, which, of course, is essentially the narrative of history itself.

The double nature of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as a story of individuals and as an allegorical narrative of history is one that can be found in essentially all realist novels. One might say that this doubleness is embedded in the genre itself. In *The Historical Novel* Georg Lukács insists that what he calls “typicality” is a crucial feature of the best historical novels—though he employs this subgenre as a paradigm of the realist novel as a whole. “Typical” characters for Lukács are not average or ordinary individuals: they might, in fact, be quite eccentric or extraordinary. Whatever they might be, however, they have become as a result of living in the

particular historical circumstances in which they live. They are, in short, who they are as a result of their historical contexts and the historical process. Thus, the stories of such characters simultaneously tell the stories of the historical worlds in which they live, endowing the novels in which they appear with the energies of history itself.

Jameson, while endorsing Lukács's notion, has supplemented it by insisting that typification is an "essentially allegorical phenomenon" that helps to establish a "one-to-one relationship between individual characters and their social or historical reference" (*Political* 162). Put differently, the great realist novels (Balzac is again the paradigm) bridge the gap between private and public experience that bourgeois ideology (and, consequently, the realist novel in its conservative phase) seeks to establish and perpetuate. Of course, Jameson, a few years later, would attempt, controversially, to champion "third-world" literature, largely by arguing that it maintained the ability to bridge the public-private gap that had been lost in first-world literature. In particular, Jameson, always on the look-out for allegory, argues that "all third-world texts are necessarily ... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel" ("Third-World," 69, Jameson's emphasis). Further, Jameson argues that this allegory can function because third-world societies still maintain a sense of community that provides a connection between public and private experience that has been entirely lost in the radically fragmented and thoroughly reified world of late capitalism. This connection provides the allegorical impulse behind third-world texts, in which "*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (69, Jameson's emphasis).

From this point of view, it is useful to note Raymond Williams's suggestion that postcolonial novels such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* have much in common with "English literature of rural change, as late as Hardy" in that both kinds of literature make clear "the internal tensions" of their societies, as new modes of existence come to threaten older ones (*Country* 286). My reading suggests that Hardy's novels, by reaching back to the earlier part of the nineteenth-century, also resemble postcolonial novels in maintaining a sense of connections between the private narratives of individuals and the historical narratives of the worlds in which they live.

Meanwhile, the individual-historical (or private-public) doubleness of the best realist novels per Lukács—and of Hardy's novels per my reading—can be described particularly well through the work of Sartre, whose own double rootedness in existentialism and Marxism can be seen as a version of the same double focus on individuals and on history.⁸ Indeed, Jameson has noted that much of Sartre's originality as a Marxist thinker resides in his ability to combine the individual and the historical. Jameson thus notes the "crucial importance that biography has always had for" Sartre, biographical models providing a basis for so much of the structure of Sartre's thought (*Marxism* 210). This inventive combination of biographical and historical narrative modes allows Sartre, Jameson goes on to declare, to produce an innovative vision of history that allows us to "see it from the inside out, through the actions of individuals" (*Marxism* 228).

This inside-out vision of history is precisely what Hardy produces in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and in all of the Wessex novels, each of which dramatizes, in the experiences of the major characters, the transformation of rural life in Wessex by the onslaught of capitalist modernization. This kind of allegorical vision is the key, for Georg Lukács, to the power of the

early bourgeois novel, though it is a power that had supposedly been mostly lost by the time of Hardy's writing, having peaked in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Adopting the Weberian vocabulary of "rationalization" as a synonym for capitalist modernization, Jameson argues that this process is

first and foremost to be described as the analytical dismantling of the various traditional or "natural" [*naturwüchsige*] unities (social groups, institutions, human relationships, forms of authority, activities of a cultural and ideological as well as of a productive nature) into their component parts with a view to their "Taylorization," that is, their reorganization into more efficient systems which function according to an instrumental, or binary, means/ends logic. (*Political* 227)

This turn to efficiency, or rationalization, or administration (depending on the terminology one prefers) is part of a consolidation of power in which the formerly dynamic and revolutionary nature of the bourgeoisie as a class is transformed into the stodginess and conservatism with which the very word "bourgeois" is now widely considered to be synonymous. Having already seized power, the point of the bourgeoisie is now (reversing Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach) not to change the world, but to interpret and manage it.

In terms of history itself, the conflict between the new and the old—or between modernity and tradition—that underlies *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is one that, per *The Communist Manifesto*, modernity will always win, because that is the fundamental nature of the narrative of history from a Marxist perspective. It should therefore come as no surprise that Farfrae, being on the right side of history, has far more success (both professionally and personally) in the novel than does Henchard. Not only does Farfrae have far more success than Henchard as a grain merchant, but he even ends up marrying the ersatz Elizabeth-Jane (who turns out actually to be the daughter of Newson, Henchard's original daughter having died young). And, if Farfrae's marriage has all sorts of symbolic resonances, the most powerfully symbolic motif in the confrontation between Henchard and Farfrae comes when Farfrae succeeds

Henchard as the mayor of Casterbridge, thus becoming the book's second title character, while at the same time demonstrating the way in which Farfrae, with his more modern attitudes, has literally supplanted the more traditional Henchard in the overall order of things.

The mayors of small towns might not, in general, be the movers and shakers of history, but Farfrae's ascent to the position of mayor is an important marker in the history of Casterbridge, a formerly old-fashioned environ that is now at last being dragged, however reluctantly, into the modern world. Elizabeth-Jane herself, perhaps as a result of having grown up in Canada, is a modern girl, as marked by her initial response to Casterbridge when she and her mother arrive there: "What an old-fashioned place it seems to be!" she exclaims, and the exclamation is hardly issued with glee. It is entirely appropriate, then, that she ends up married to Farfrae, the marker of a modernity of which she is already fully a part.

Casterbridge itself is not fully a part of that modernity, but it is becoming so. Indeed, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is very much a novel about history and historical change.⁹ Casterbridge itself is built on the site of an old Roman town, so filled with ruins and artifacts that (at least according to Hardy's narrator) one can hardly dig beneath the surface of the town's ground without unearthing the skeleton of a long-dead Roman soldier (74). Casterbridge is thus a virtual historical museum, but it is not merely a static museum of what was: it is a museum of historical change. The Romans have been gone for fifteen hundred years, and their relics serve as reminders that things do change over time and that the past is truly different from the present, which is thus presumably different from the future: "They had lived so long ago, their time was so unlike the present, their hopes and motives were so widely removed from ours, that between them and the living there seemed to stretch a gulf too wide for even a spirit to pass" (75). But the present of Casterbridge is a time of change as well, and the world that has reigned in the town in

more recent centuries, the world Elizabeth-Jane finds so quaint but to which Henchard still clings with an intense ferocity, is in the process of going the way of the Romans, quickly headed into the dustbin of history to be supplanted by the more modern capitalist world represented by Farfrae.

If Farfrae in many ways serves as a counterpart to Henchard who helps us to understand Henchard's allegorical position in the *Mayor of Casterbridge*, the same might also be said of Jude Fawley, the protagonist of Hardy's last novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1895), who also serves as a sort of counter to Henchard, just as *Jude the Obscure* serves as something of a dialectical counter to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The two novels are similar in terms of the emphasis on the biography of the protagonist as the model for the plot and in their focus on the existential struggle of the protagonist in a hostile universe. Both of Hardy's novels give the protagonists the chance of personal freedom, and both reject the inevitability of fate, despite Hardy's sometime reputation as a cruel puppeteer whose characters dance at the ends of deterministic strings over which they have no control.

In point of fact, though, Hardy's protagonists have much more freedom than might be immediately obvious. Andrzej Dinejko, who trots out the standard line of Hardy criticism by noting that "Hardy's major fiction depicts the frailty of man in a malevolent or at least indifferent universe. His vision of life was certainly deterministic, pessimistic and tragic." But he goes on to admit that Hardy nevertheless espouses a humanist vision in which a certain amount of existential freedom is possible (46). It is Terry Eagleton, however, who breaks fully free of the traditional reading of Hardy with his famous reading of *Jude the Obscure* more than forty years ago, in which he argues of Jude that "his will does not consent to be beaten" and that he "continues to struggle almost to the end." For Eagleton, "*Jude the Obscure*, like all of Hardy's

novels, proclaims no inexorable determinism” (“Thomas Hardy” 44). The freedom detected by Eagleton is the result of self-awareness, knowledge, and the individual’s responsibility toward his freedom¹⁰. Granted, Hardy depicts the universe as an inhospitable one in *Jude the Obscure*, and it is certainly true that, everywhere Jude goes, he feels himself to be an alienated outcast; whether he is at Marygreen, Christminster, and Melchester, he is decidedly not at home. All these places represent the hostile world in which Jude faces so many obstacles; however, whereas Michael Henchard remains rooted in the facticity of the values of his traditional world, Jude is essentially rootless. Never feeling at home anywhere certainly adds to his struggles, but it also facilitates those struggles by offering him greater flexibility to fashion his own identity, his being-for-itself, apart from any pre-existing suppositions that are thrust upon him by others.

Jude, despite his hardships and frustrations, and despite the continual thwarting of his ambitions by a system that offers few opportunities to someone of his background, never dwells on despair or pessimism; he never doubts the significance of his existence, despite all the struggles he must endure simply to keep going. Whenever Jude goes through a negative phase, begins to experience a lack of self, it is this very lack that actually helps him to negate and surpass the despair by putting his old selves behind and moving forward into the new. Jude plays a constant active role in recovering and moving toward a new aim, after the previous one has been crushed; through action and perseverance, Jude strives to find the being-for-itself. Throughout the novel the existential elements of the condition of man, fate, freedom, and the significance of his existence, are evident in Jude’s life and his struggle to find his authentic being. Jude’s being is constantly in the process of negation and transcendence as each new Jude replaces the old in a constant ongoing process. The established fact is that people live in a social world, man is unable to determine his environment or other people’s actions, and thus there will

be difficulties in dealing with the world. Nevertheless, in man's condition of freedom, he has the power to desire and to act, which refutes the naturalist/determinist perspective. Humans live in a social world, so social conditions of heredity and environment are inescapable in shaping the character of each individual; however, each individual also plays a part in constituting his own ever-evolving identity.

Jude is orphaned early in life, giving an early beginning to his lack of ties to the past. As an orphan child, Jude (living with his aunt) the unhappy Jude feels that he is not wanted in his home; on a larger scale, he already experiences feelings of confusion and disorientation in the face of an alienating universe. Accordingly, Jude consistently displays a great sympathy with animals, with whom he seems to feel a certain sense of solidarity, the difference being that, as a human being, he has the agency to change his situation rather than simply to live it, as animals do, or as humans (such as Henchard) trapped in facticity and being-in-itself, essentially do as well. Even as a young boy, when he is assigned to drive hungry birds away from the fields, he instead sympathizes with them and feeds them, because "they seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them" (8). Of course, Jude might also sympathize with animals because he senses that they are trapped in a way he is not, because he does have the ability to transcend his condition and develop into the being-for-itself. Far from being free as a bird, he is free in a way that birds—doomed to a single identity and living forever in the same way—can never be.

The young Jude lives in the old-fashioned village of Marygreen, but he does not feel connected to the village and is not rooted in the traditional life there, which has in any case already become something of an anachronism. As Eagleton notes, the traditional view of Jude as a peasant boy who struggles to become a scholar is inaccurate, partly because he is simply *not* a

peasant, that class having already been swept away by the flow of history. Indeed, Jude has famously been declared by Arnold Kettle to be the “first working-class hero” in British fiction, even though, strictly speaking, he is an artisan and not a proletarian (270). Kettle goes on to explain his insight in a way that emphasizes Jude’s modernity:

Jude is not, of course, a typical working-man in the sense of being an average one; but he is typical in a far more fruitful way, artistically; for he embodies in his thoughts and feelings so many of the deepest aspirations of his class and generation—for education, for an enlarged professional skill, for a more scientific philosophy, and above all for personal and sexual relationships based on a new level of candour and equality. (271)

Jude displays a very modern restlessness and dissatisfaction with the status quo, even as a child. Everyone else, including the children of his age, seems to be satisfied with the common values and the kind of life offered at Marygreen, but Jude resents that life and its stale blandness: “How ugly it is here!” (52). Marygreen is indeed ugly and culturally barren, clinging (but just barely) to a way of life that has already been rendered obsolete by capitalist modernization. “Marygreen,” notes Eagleton, “is a stale remnant, a plundered landscape denuded of its historical traditions” (37).

Unlike Henchard, who finds himself unable to cope with a modernization that sweeps over him after he has already been rooted in tradition, Jude lives in a world in which that tradition has already been essentially destroyed, offering both difficulty and opportunity. Jude is aware that his existence on its own is meaningless, so that he needs to act in order to give meaning to his existence. He thus well illustrates Sartre’s insistence that, “man primarily exists—that man is, before all else, something which propels itself towards a future and is aware that it is doing so” (Sartre, *Existentialism* 15). Jude creates his essence through a series of actions beginning with the pursuit of his dream to become a scholar, his inter-subjective relationships, and losing faith in the divine and in the common values of his society. Sartre again provides a

helpful gloss, noting that “a man is no other than a series of undertakings, that he is the sum, the organization, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings” (Sartre, *Existentialism* 21).

The young Jude believes that in order to change his current condition and become a scholar, he needs to work on himself, to read, and to become knowledgeable. His pursuit of this task in many ways makes him an exemplary individual, per the existentialist philosophy of Sartre. Jude cannot afford to go to a regular day school because he works and helps his aunt during the day; thus, “he was not among the regular day scholars ... but one who had attended the night school only during the present teacher’s term of office” (48). Jude insists on pursuing his education, no matter the hardship, refusing to be stopped if there is any way he can keep going. As Sartre puts it, “I only know that whatever may be in my power to make it so, I shall do; beyond that, I can count on nothing” (Sartre, *Existentialism* 25). When Jude asks his aunt if he can go and visit Mr. Phillotson at Christminster, a nearby university town (clearly modeled on Oxford) where he hopes someday to continue his education, she attempts to discourage him by telling him “We never had anything to do with folk in Christminster, nor folk in Christminster with we” (57).

Jude, however, is undeterred by his aunt’s discouraging (but well-meaning) words, and he remains determined to go to Christminster when the right time comes. Jude teaches himself while working to help his aunt; he does not allow those chores or the difficult conditions they create to hinder his learning process. Instead, Jude finds the time to read even while on “a creaking cart with a white-brown tilt” (73). Jude embraces big dreams, he gains rich knowledge, thus creating himself anew, realizing his life value in the process of action. Even when Jude becomes a successful tradesman, a skilled stonemason and church builder, he never gives up on

his passion to learn, which to him is a worthwhile goal in and of itself, even if it has no clear practical application: “he yet was interested in the pursuit on its own account.” (77)

Jude also pursues the development of his selfhood through his interpersonal relationships with others, including sexual relationships that made the book quite controversial at the time of its initial publication¹¹. In his relationships with the women Arabella and Sue, Jude proves that even though the “I” and the “Other” are indispensable to each other, there will always be conflict; each one desires to shape their subjectivity at the expense of the other, but at all times Jude struggles to maintain a developing subjectivity, a being-for-itself, as opposed to a static being-in-itself, and again being for-itself instead of being-for-others in a way again well-described by Sartre: “The equal dignity of being, possessed by my being-for-others and by being-for-myself permits a perpetually disintegrating synthesis and a perpetual game of escape from the for-itself to the for-others, and from the for-others to the for-itself” (*Being* 58).

In Jude’s relationship with Arabella, Arabella’s approach is similar to Henchard’s way in dealing with the Other; she is the Other to Jude, but the subject to herself, and thus she seeks to possess Jude, who is just an object of possession to establish her being. She refuses his subjective being, and wants to impose her subjectivity on his being. Jude is serious about wanting to go to college and eventually to be a scholar—it is his life dream. However, Arabella, having secured Jude in marriage, feels that he should concentrate on his new husbandly duties. She “felt that all these makeshifts were temporary; she had gained a husband; that was a thing—a husband for buying her frocks and hats when he should begin to get frightened a bit, and stick to his trade, and throw aside those stupid books for practical undertakings” (103).

Arabella seduces Jude; then, after he sleeps with her, she tells him that she is pregnant. Accepting responsibility for the consequences of his actions, Jude marries her. What makes

Jude's marriage to Arabella more valid than Henchard's second marriage to Susan in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is that Jude takes responsibility for the present situation of his actions towards Arabella right away, but Henchard's second marriage to Susan represented dealing with a prior facticity as a current condition, thus, leading himself into bad faith. Even after marrying Arabella, Jude continues to study and read in the hope of pursuing his dream to become a scholar. Although he is miserable with his new wife, he does not abandon his responsibility toward her in order to pursue his dream, as the young Henchard (however limited his own dreams might have been) essentially did when he felt that his wife and child were hindering his advancement in terms of his career, selling them like cattle in order to get rid of them. On the other hand, Jude also does not abandon his dream in order to fulfill his new responsibilities. When Arabella leaves Jude, he moves not to despair but toward his dream again, because "there is no hope except in action" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 31).

Jude goes to Christminster, the original focus of his scholarly aspirations. As he gets there he realizes what an outsider he is, but maintains the hope that someday he will be accepted as an insider among the scholars there: "For the present he was outside the gates of everything, colleges included; perhaps someday he would be inside" (133). Jude begins to work as an artisan during the day and reads at night to "get ready by accumulating money and knowledge, and await whatever chances were afforded to such a one of becoming a son of the University" (134).

Jude also seeks to be a clergyman (one of the major career paths open to one of a scholarly bent) and studies theology, wishing "next to be a scholar, to be a Christian divine" (76). Jude at the beginning of the novel admires Christianity, thinking that all intellectuals are respectable Christians. Naively, he believes that being a scholar necessarily means being a good Christian, thus accepting without challenge the received wisdom of his society and operating

under the influence of being-in-itself. Denied the opportunity to be a scholar of religion, he becomes a craftsman of it, working to restore the Christminster's crumbling churches, relics of a former time when religion played a more prominent role in daily life.

This work, however, helps him to begin to see that religion is rooted in the past, while the world is moving toward the future. The buildings he sees around him, so magnificent from the far distance, are not golden temples of learning and enlightenment but rotting sepulchers of obfuscation. They are essentially ruins, out of place in a modern world in which new technologies are just beginning to emerge. Further, none of the work of restoration he sees going on in Christminster (and to which he himself will eventually contribute) represents any genuine sort of renewal, though at first (still trapped in the ultimate facticity of religion) he is unable fully to appreciate the implications of this insight:

He perceived that at best only copying, patching and imitating went on here; which he fancied to be owing to some temporary and local cause. He did not at that time see that mediaevalism was as dead as a fern leaf in a lump of coal¹²; that other developments were shaping in the world around him, in which Gothic architecture and its associations had no place. (131)¹³

Jude is a modern man, restless, unsatisfied, striving. Born in a swirling world in which all that is solid melts into air amid the onward drive of capitalist modernization, he must seek the new and can never be content, as is Gogol's Akaky, with the simple work of restoration and reproduction of artifacts from the past. As a result, it is no surprise that he eventually shakes off his inherited religious and social prejudices altogether, as he begins to realize the significance of being free of them in terms of opening a path for his intellect to develop freely. "The for-itself is in-itself losing itself as in-itself in order to found itself as consciousness" (Sartre, *Being* 82).

It is, however, a realization that is hard won, and Jude must suffer much to overcome his initial faith in moribund values and institutions. As Keating puts it, Jude's tragedy is his initial

failure to realize that Christminster and all it represents are obsolete in the modern world. “To be modern,” Keating notes (sounding very Sartrean), “is to experience lost positives and to have no idea what can possibly replace them” (128). But for Sartre, the trick is to avoid seeking replacements for what has been lost in the past and instead to move forward without the support of fixed values.

Jude is rejected when he seeks formal admission to the university and is sternly advised to stay in his place: “You will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course” (167). Later, having begun a new relationship with Sue, Jude returns to Christminster once again, with Sue pregnant, and with his three children (two by Sue and one by Arabella) accompanying them. Once again he hopes to be admitted into the university, refusing to accept final defeat and noting that “it was my poverty and not my will that consented to be beaten” (398).

Moving through life, Jude is often disappointed, even tragically so, but never fully defeated until the very end. For example, while he gradually loses faith he ultimately refuses to become a churchman, but this change is not a defeat. Instead, it represents transcendence of facticity and movement toward a new freedom. A pursuer of the truth, Jude does not accept self-deceit; thus, he realizes he is not fit for a profession that asks people to yield to social customs that he himself has started to question and resent. He wishes to be happy, although wherever he goes misery corners and frustrates him; the university rejects him, apparently because he is poor and not of the proper background, and the church is indifferent to his suffering.

Jude, in fact, feels that the universe as whole is indifferent to his hopes and dreams, but does not feel that this situation should be cause to abandon those hopes and dreams. Although social circumstances prevent Jude from realizing his dreams, he never loses his determination

actively to pursue and realize his authentic existence. Jude realizes that reference to commonly-accepted values is not what will lead to finding his subjectivity, a very crucial element in an existential life, in which all is in flux and values are not immutable but must constantly be reevaluated and reconsidered as part of the ongoing process of living.

This aspect of Jude's character can be usefully illuminated through reference to the figure of "Little Father Time," Jude's eldest son (by Arabella), who, though physically a child, is mentally old beyond his years. Weary of life and wishing he had never been born, Father Time ultimately kills his two half siblings (Jude's children by Sue) and then himself. Contrary to the normal flow of history, in this case the old destroys the new, and this motif in the text suggests the undesirability of such an outcome.

On the other hand, Father Time is explicitly identified in the text as a new sort of character, a symptom of modern meaninglessness and hopelessness.¹⁴ In individual terms, Father Time serves as a sort of counter to his father in this sense. Faced with the realization that religion and the other anchors of meaning in life no longer hold sway, one can either treat this lack of pre-defined meaning as an opportunity to make one's own meaning (as does Jude) or as a reason to turn to nihilism and to see no reason to go on living (as does Jude's eldest son). Jude accepts the responsibility of freedom, while Father Time fails to overcome the fear of freedom. Of course, one can also retreat into the past and attempt to recover lost values, which is the course taken by Sue, who turns to the solace of religion after the deaths of her children.

However, simply choosing to live by one's own created values, as does Jude, rather than inherited common values, does not excuse one from bearing the responsibility of one's actions. As their children die Jude refuses to turn to religion like Sue, because Sue seems to accept the idea that god punished them for their unlawful relationship. Jude on the other hand, does not

believe that he deserves to suffer for being in love and making a choice to live with Sue without marriage. He also believes that if god existed he would have saved his children. There is obviously a great deal of social commentary in the depiction of Jude's personal relationships, and any number of critics have described the important role of Hardy's belief in the necessity of marriage reform and in a general reconsideration of attitudes toward gender roles in shaping the novel.¹⁵ But the major utopian energies of the novel reside in the depiction of Jude himself as an indomitable individual who refuses to let social circumstances sway him from at least making the effort to improve himself and his lot in life.

Moving through and discarding the accepted values of his society, Jude is able to cast away the being-in-itself, continually negating his old selves in order to make room for new ones: "The for-itself can not sustain nihilation without determining itself as a lack of being" (Sartre, *Being* 85). Jude realizes that neither Christianity as a human institution nor god as a divine power care about his troubles or his pain, thus allowing him to break free from all bonds of social conformity and to stand out, by affirming his subjective existence:

The senses of being no longer a hypocrite to himself afforded his mind a relief which gave him calm. He might go on believing as before, but he professed nothing, and no longer owned and exhibited engines of faith which, as their proprietor, he might naturally be supposed to exercise on himself first of all. (280)

Jude believes that, rather than forcing his thinking into conformity with the views of the world, it is the world that needs to shed a system of values that is no longer appropriate in the modern era.

By not following Sue's steps, he makes a statement that religion seems to promote passivity, and he would rather take action against the suffering of this hostile universe. He tells Sue, "You make me hate Christianity, and mysticism, or Sacerdotalism, or whatever it may be called... I am glad I had nothing to do with divinity" (426). Jude reaches the realization that human beings live in a world of abandonment and he will not deceive himself by relying on

transcendental powers to save him from suffering. His life was determined through his actions; he was defining his identity through existence, nothingness, negation, and action, and he bore the responsibility for all his self-made choices. His dreams fail, his lovers leave him, his children all die, and he himself eventually dies alone. Indeed, Jude curses the day he was born, but not because he thinks that his existence is worthless. Instead, he believes that he did not deserve to die in such a way precisely because his life did have value.

Although he dies miserably, Jude (unlike Henchard) never found that his existence in itself was worthless. However, Jude does not initially realize that it is not being admitted to the university and becoming a professional scholar that would make his existence valuable, or that being with Sue would validate him as a man. It is his own will and action; it is in the pursuit of his dream, not in the realization of the dream, that he realizes his authentic life many times through the process of negation and pursuit, moving forward toward freedom, even if his goals cannot be reached. Material success does not necessarily mean realizing the authenticity of one's own existence; just as material failure does not mean that one has not realized authenticity. Henchard achieves a certain amount of material success, but is never able to grasp a true essence to his being; Jude achieves very little material success, but is able to grasp that essence through the ongoing struggle to remake himself in an authentic way.

If one again reads Jude's story allegorically, as an individual life embedded within a much larger historical narrative, it is clear that his situation here again differs dramatically from that of Henchard. Jude constantly strives to move forward; Henchard's efforts are, in a sense, designed to resist the forward movement of history. Of course, by the time of Jude's story, the bourgeoisie, entrenched in power, have become obstacles to change, rather than agents of it, so Jude's attempts to move forward also go against the dominant force in his society. As a result,

those attempts meet with one failure after another, partly due to Jude's own sometime ignorance of the institutions within which he seeks success and partly due to the resistance of those institutions to the kind of path that he seeks to carve out for himself. As Eagleton notes, "The historical irony in which Jude is trapped is that personal fulfilment can be achieved only by painfully appropriating the very culture which denies and rejects him as a man" ("Thomas Hardy" 38).

For example, Jude's movement from Marygreen to Christminster does not, in fact, represent a step forward when viewed as an allegory of history. If anything, Christminster is even more tradition-bound than Marygreen, and Eagleton is entirely correct when he declares that "if Marygreen is stripped of history, Christminster is buried under it, a repressive rubble of crumbling masonry and dead creeds" ("Thomas Hardy" 38). Thus, if the utopian energies of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* lie primarily in its acknowledgement of the sweeping historical changes then underway in English society (despite the fact that those changes work to the detriment of Henchard), no such energies would appear to be available in *Jude the Obscure*, which narrates the stubborn resistance to change of a late Victorian bourgeois society gone stale and conservative.

This resistance, of course, leaves Jude no alternative but ultimate failure, though, from the perspective of Sartrean existentialism, the very effort to succeed is a victory in its own right, especially as Jude's effort does entail a considerable amount of success in its own right in terms of his ability to transcend his original facticity and to move beyond the inherited social and religious values that are initially thrust upon him. In a larger, Marxist sense, though, Jude's failures are also utopian in that they point toward the fundamentally dishonest and misleading nature of the bourgeois ideology that informs his society, with its rhetoric of individual freedom,

equality, and opportunity. In demonstrating the false nature of the claims of late Victorian society to offer freedom and opportunity to everyone, *Jude the Obscure* potentially points toward the possibility of an alternative society in which these claims might be legitimate—or at least asks readers to ponder that possibility and potentially to ask why it has not been realized in their own present-day societies.

Jameson's recent work has emphasized that, especially in the modern moment of capitalist decadence, the notion that failure itself can have a strong utopian component is central to any properly Marxist theorization of utopianism. For Jameson, a fully achieved utopia (such as socialism) would be so different from our current conditions that it would literally be unthinkable, given that our imaginations are made up of "bits and pieces of the here and now" (*Archaeologies* xiii). This means, says Jameson, that "our imaginations are hostages to our own mode of production (and perhaps to whatever remnants of past ones it has preserved)" (xiii). Of course, certain modes of production also enable certain kinds of thought (utopian or otherwise), and one could argue that genuine utopianism is always historicist in the sense of requiring the ability to imagine fundamental systemic change over time. Thus, for example, Jameson has noted that Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), generally identified as the founding text of the utopian genre *per se*, was limited by its pre-capitalist position and by More's subsequent inability to imagine "capitalism and the market." Thus, Jameson concludes that More—unlike later utopian thinkers such as Fourier, Bellamy, and Wells (writing after capitalism had become hegemonic)—lacks the vision of historical change provided by capitalism; moreover, More, for Jameson (acknowledging here that he follows the work of Louis Marin) consequently also lacks the "cognitive instruments of historical materialism," which of course means that he also lacks the analytical tools provided by Marx in response to capitalism ("Utopia and Failure").

A central premise of Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* is that, at best, any vision of utopia can "serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment." Thus, for Jameson "the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively" (*Archaeologies* xiii). Such failed utopias provide a powerful critique of the intellectual and imaginative limitations thrust upon us by the ideological entrapment of our present moment. But they also remind us of the need continually to strive for utopia rather than hoping literally to reach it. Here, Jameson is no doubt influenced by Sartre (as he always is), though he draws most directly upon the thought of Ernst Bloch, the theorist who has exerted the strongest influence on Jameson's theorization of utopia and probably the twentieth century's greatest thinker (and poet) of utopianism. Bloch's central work, the massive *The Principle of Hope* (reinforced by its initial working title, "Dreams of a Better Life") was published in three volumes in German from 1954 to 1959 but did not appear in a full English translation until 1985, perhaps because there was little market for Bloch's ideas in a United States where utopianism, not to mention Marxism, was decidedly out of fashion. Jameson has described Bloch's energetic and rambunctious text as a "vast and disorderly exploration of the manifestations of hope on all levels of reality," and it is certainly the case that *The Principle of Hope* is an unsystematic, visionary, and even poetic work that is consistently able to find powerful utopian energies in even the most seemingly debased of cultural works (*Marxism* 120). Bloch has even been accused by some of being a mystic, but his conception of utopia is largely a practical and scientific one. By definition, Bloch's version of utopia need not be reached, indeed *cannot* be reached, but it can be worked toward and sought after. A goal reached is no longer a utopian goal at all. Utopian thought is always thought that reaches beyond the real conditions of the present world, but for Bloch, genuine utopian thought is shot through with concrete possibility, and any genuinely

utopian vision is one that can be worked toward in reality, even if it can never quite be achieved, partly because the fluid nature of utopian thought will mean that the goal is constantly changing. Bloch's utopian vision thus focuses not on any specific revolutionary change, but on what Jameson calls the "irrepressible revolutionary wish" (*Marxism* 159).

Bloch here is, of course, quite congruent with Sartrean existentialism, in which any being-for-itself that is fully achieved will calcify into a being-in-itself that must be further transcended. Importantly, meanwhile, Bloch's vision, however poetic his rhetoric of imagining a better world might seem to be, is resolutely historical and involves a process that must occur in real historical time. Among other things, his vision of thinking beyond the present is always oriented toward a future in which the present has been transformed into something new, not toward a past in which the present has not yet appeared. Utopian thought, for Bloch, must reach toward the "Not-Yet-Conscious ... towards the side of something new that is dawning up, that has never been conscious before, not, for example, something forgotten, something rememberable that has been" (*Principle* 11).

In this sense Bloch's utopianism differs dramatically from capitalist utopianism, which also reaches constantly toward the future, spurring constant new consumption, but does so in ways that discourage the imagination of genuine systemic alternatives to capitalism and that thus work against, rather than toward, the fundamental transformation of society, and especially of the mode of production. The message is clear: capitalism is a wonderful system that can provide you with a wonderful life, if you only strive to work harder and harder in order to be able to produce (and, especially) consume more and more. Thus, if the rhetoric of consumerism is designed to convince individual subjects that life is fine, despite all evidence to the contrary, Bloch's conception of utopia is a prescription for surviving current hard times by acknowledging that

things are not fine at all but imagining better times in the future. In particular, Bloch recommends that individuals seek sources of hope to help them cope with the exigencies of life under late capitalism, where he sees fear as the principal emotional experience, a diagnosis that would be hard to dispute in relation to life in the world of Jude Fawley.

Overcoming fear is thus central to Bloch's utopian philosophy, just as it is a key to the existentialist philosophy of Sartre, in which the individual must overcome the fear of freedom in order to be able to avoid being trapped in the bad faith of avoiding the responsibility to struggle for freedom by claiming that no action is worth pursuing because no real freedom is possible. It is in this sense that Jude, who could have given up so many times, who could have ended his quest for more at so many points, is a success despite all his failures. Moreover, in overcoming his original ideological limitations (and in particular in overcoming the religious faith with which he begins his adult life), Jude is a double success in that he attains imaginative possibilities that previously could not have been available to him.

Jude's biography in a sense repeats the history of the British bourgeoisie, who rose against all odds from a despised position in the medieval world to a position of power and dominance in the new capitalist order. And his story, I would argue, draws upon the energies of the earlier bourgeois cultural revolution, energies that, in a literary sense, were most clearly and powerfully expressed via the emergent realist novel. If the "tragedy" of Michael Henchard is that he clings to the past and thus fails to ride the tide of history forward, the "tragedy" of Jude Fawley is that he attempts to ride the tide of bourgeois history when it is already on the ebb in the latter part of the nineteenth century. But the historical energies of the emergent realist novel are still present in both texts and inform them in important ways.

In late-nineteenth-century Russia, the historical situation was much more muddled, and the force of bourgeois history had yet to assert itself. However, as I noted in Chapter 3, realism and the novel had become important forces, bringing with them important ideological energies even in the works of writers (such as Nikolai Gogol and Fyodor Dostoevsky) who were consciously horrified by the implications of bourgeois ideological incursions into Mother Russia. In the second half of the century, Dostoevsky was joined by Leo Tolstoy to constitute the twin towers of Russian realist fiction. Both of these writers were, of course, heavily influenced by the unique historical circumstances in which they lived and worked, though both also produced works of fiction that were significantly informed by the energies of realism itself, apart from their distinctive individual characteristics as writers. In their very different ways, these two men produced works that could seem as bitter and pessimistic as Hardy ever could, yet that still contained important utopian energies that can be helpfully revealed by reading them through the lens of existentialist Marxism. I will turn to that task in the following chapter.

Notes

¹ For a classic reading of Hardy in this way, see Paterson. But see also Peter Widdowson's influential argument that Hardy's novels are properly considered not tragedy, but social satire. On this issue, see also Lerner.

² On film noir and existentialism, see Faison.

³ On *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as a meditation on history, see Reid.

⁴ In a sense, Jude Fawley, in particular, is doubly out of step with history. Appearing in a novel written too late to fully draw upon the historical energies of the emergent bourgeois novel, he himself lives too early to take advantage of the sweeping social reforms (including much broader public education for working-class children) that were instituted in response to the Depression-fueled social crises of the 1890s. On these crises and the resultant reforms, see Hobsbawm.

⁵ See Kershner for an excellent discussion of the discourse of degeneration in its historical context.

⁶ For a discussion of the ways in which Hardy's famed pessimism reflects social problems of his day, see Sherman.

⁷ On the other hand, Lucetta, in evading Henchard's attempts, demonstrates her own ability to move beyond the facticity of the past, declaring that "I won't be a slave to the past—I'll love where I choose!" (184). On this aspect of the book, see Dorn.

⁸ Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* has generally been seen as his major attempt to reconcile Marxism and existentialism, which for many have seemed incompatible. However, see Jameson for a complication of this reading (*Marxism* 206–305). For a good general discussion of Sartre's "existential Marxism" see Miller.

⁹ In discussing various theoretical attitudes toward history, L. Mabile cites *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as emblematic of the historicist thinking of a nineteenth century that has been called "the century of the historical" (37).

¹⁰ That freedom is a central concern of *Jude the Obscure* has been noted by numerous critics, though these critics (see, for example, Clavin) have typically discussed the novel within the context of conceptions of freedom related to nineteenth-century liberalism.

¹¹ For an argument that *Jude the Obscure* is informed by a belief that the human race was evolving toward a state of "universal sympathy," see Sumpter (684). Sumpter, however, suggests that the decidedly unsympathetic reception of the novel might have convinced Hardy that the novel as a genre was unlikely to contribute to this evolution.

¹² This reference to a fossilized fern leaf immediately suggests Darwin's theory of evolution, thus contrasting the dusty and unchanging antiquarianism of Christminster not only with one of most important "modern" ideas of the age, but also with an idea that specifically suggests the centrality of change to all life. Numerous critics, of course, have noted the importance of Darwin's theory to Hardy's own thought. See, for example, Sumpter and Mallett.

¹³ For a reading of the role of architecture in *Jude the Obscure* within the context of the widespread effort at architectural restoration underway in late Victorian England, see Cannon. In particular, Cannon notes that Hardy evokes a tension between a "restorationist desire to revivify historical objects" and a desire simply to "secure the relics" of a dead past (202). Hardy, of course, had once been a budding architect, an experience on which he clearly drew in writing *Jude the Obscure*. Hardy was also the son of a stonemason and had once considered a clerical career until he lost his religious faith. *Jude the Obscure* is, in general, his most autobiographical novel.

¹⁴ Read in a slightly different way, Father Time can also be read allegorically as a figure of bourgeois decadence in the late nineteenth century. In Hardy's Wessex, though, the process of change is still underway, even if the bourgeoisie have already consolidated their power in England's urban centers. In Wessex, then, the emergent bourgeoisie are still struggling for power, but are conducting this struggle at a moment in history when their class as a whole has already declined into conservative decadence, much like the postcolonial bourgeoisie excoriated by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

¹⁵ For example, see Keating for a brief discussion of contemporary marriage reform as a context for Hardy's treatment of such themes in his fiction. Noting Hardy's "obsession in his novels with the desirability of divorce reform and with sexual double standards," Keating concludes that for Hardy "there could be no freedom for men until 'the woman question,' as it was commonly called, was settled" (168). See also Boumelha for a classic, traditional study of Hardy's exploration of the role of women in late Victorian society. Among other things, Boumelha notes that, in Hardy's later fiction, "sexual discord and marital breakdown, which had previously only hovered impendingly on the periphery of Hardy's fiction" now become central to the novels (48).

Chapter Five

Nothing Left to Lose: The Quest for Freedom in Fyodor Dostoevsky's

Notes from Underground and Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

The Hedgehog and the Fox, Isaiah Berlin's relatively brief but hugely influential study of Leo Tolstoy, argues that most writers and thinkers can be metaphorically divided into the categories of "hedgehogs"—who tend to interpret all phenomena within the framework of a single totalizing idea—and "foxes," who adopt a pluralistic perspective informed by a diverse variety of ideas and knowledge. Dostoevsky, focused on religion as a counter to modern decadence and cultural anarchy, is for Berlin a classic hedgehog. Tolstoy, on the other hand, is a particularly complex and interesting case, because (at least according to Berlin), Tolstoy yearns to have such a single, overarching framework, but ultimately fails to achieve that kind of totalizing perspective, instead employing a wide range of knowledge and perspectives in his work, especially in *War and Peace* (1869).

If one employs the vocabulary of Mikhail Bakhtin, then, one might say that Berlin sees Dostoevsky as a thoroughly monological thinker and writer, but sees Tolstoy as a writer who seeks to present a monological perspective but is finally unable to do so, producing a dialogical perspective despite himself. This vision is a relatively conventional one, partly because Berlin's own analysis has been so influential and partly it seems to correspond to common sense, given Dostoevsky's openly declared perspective (at least in the later part of his career) as a reactionary religious zealot, as compared with Tolstoy's more complex liberal-minded, humanist perspective. Categorizing writers is, however, not a simply process, and Berlin himself viewed his categorization theme as more of an intellectual game than a serious analysis. It is worth

remembering, for example, that Bakhtin himself saw the opposition between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky in very much the same way as Berlin—except that for him Tolstoy is the more monological writer, while Dostoevsky is a writer of brilliantly rich and complex dialogical polyphonic texts despite himself.

Of course, Bakhtin here is partly simply going against the grain of critical condition in order to induce an interesting conversation, much in the same way he declares, in his long essay “Discourse in the Novel” (published in English as part of *The Dialogic Imagination*) that poetry is essentially monological and thus uninteresting from the perspective of stylistic analysis, while the novel is are richer and more linguistically diverse, and thus much more worthy of careful stylistic analysis. Bakhtin’s contrast between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky also has a specific political and rhetorical charge because Dostoevsky’s work was largely spurned as reactionary by the Soviet literary establishment, while Tolstoy was regarded as one of the greatest and most forward-looking of prerevolutionary Russian writers. Tolstoy’s reputation, of course, was particularly enhanced by the great admiration for his work expressed by V. I. Lenin, who wrote extensively on Tolstoy’s work as a forerunner to socialism. Pierre Macherey, for example, after lamenting the fact that Marx himself did not live to write his planned treatise on Balzac, has declared that Lenin’s writings on Tolstoy “constitute an exceptional work in the history of scientific Marxism” and especially in the history of Marxist theoretical commentary on literature in general.

Lenin’s analysis of Tolstoy is, in many ways, a sort of forerunner to Jameson’s elaboration of the notion of the “political unconscious,” emphasizing the way in which the works of any writer derive their character largely from the historical circumstances in which they are produced, while also providing important insights into those circumstances. Thus, Lenin sees

Tolstoy's work as deriving from a nineteenth-century Russia that is building toward revolution and (ultimately) toward socialism. For Lenin, then, Tolstoy's work has a powerful utopian dimension. For Lenin,

Belonging, as he did, to the era of 1861-1904, Tolstoy in his works—both as an artist and as a thinker and preacher—embodied in amazingly bold relief the specific historical features of the entire first Russian revolution, its strengths and its weakness. (*On Literature and Art* 49)

In short, for Lenin Tolstoy's works capture historical energies that build toward revolution in Russia, much as Balzac's captured the energies of revolutionary historical change in nineteenth-century France, even if Balzac was documenting a revolution that was already well on the way to success, while the 1905 Russian revolution anticipated in the work of Tolstoy was a failure.

Such visions of historical energies in Tolstoy derive most centrally from works such as *War and Peace*, which is literally about history and contains some of the most intense engagement between fiction and history in all of literature. But, in a more subtle way, Lenin suggests that even the minutiae of Tolstoy's documentation of Russian society in the second half of the nineteenth century suggest a society in crisis, a world building toward major changes. Tolstoy, of course, is well known for the richness with which he captures various aspects of his contemporary world, and Lenin is not alone in feeling that Tolstoy's depiction of his society was not mere static description but also suggestive of coming changes, even if Tolstoy was not particularly good at describing the kind of world that might replace his own. Indeed, part of Berlin's characterization of Tolstoy was to suggest that Tolstoy's genius lay far more in describing the flaws in the present-world than in prescribing cures for their flaws or imagining worlds in which those flaws would be corrected.

At the same time, it might come as no surprise that Tolstoy's work contains certain utopian energies, especially as he dedicated the last decades of his life to idealistic social

activism that made him a worldwide celebrity—something along the lines of a Russian predecessor to Gandhi. Indeed, as Hugh McLean has argued, Tolstoy, “like most nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals” can be considered to be a utopian thinker (181). Indeed, McLean devotes a chapter of his book on Tolstoy to Tolstoy’s utopianism, comparing Tolstoy’s vaguely Christian utopian thought with that of Maxim Gorky, a socialist-inspired writer widely regarded as the founder of socialist realism. Meanwhile, though leading Bakhtinians such as Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson have seen Bakhtin’s vision of the novel as radically anti-utopian (in that the multiple and ever-changing nature of the novel opposes any notion of ideality), viewing utopia through the work of thinkers such as Bloch and Jameson—in which utopianism involves an ever-changing *quest* for utopia, rather than utopia actually achieved—suggests that Bakhtin’s vision of the novel (which contains the work of Dostoevsky at its heart) actually contains a very strong utopian dimension.¹ My argument in this chapter does not involve an attempt to argue the superiority of Tolstoy to Dostoevsky, or of Dostoevsky to Tolstoy. Instead, I use the historical vision of Jameson and the existentialist vision of Sartre to demonstrate the ways in which the works of both writers—focusing on Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* (1864) and Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” (1886)—contain strong utopian dimensions, despite the fact that both seem to be rather dark works with pessimistic undertones.

Dostoevsky’s early flirtation with socialist utopian ideas is well known, as is his conscious repudiation of such ideas later in his career, when much of his fiction was in fact designed specifically to counter such forms of utopianism. *Notes from Underground*, in particular, was written at least partly as a response to the rationalist utopia envisioned in N. G. Chernyshevsky’s 1863 novel *What Is to Be Done?* (which was itself partly a response to Ivan

Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, first published a year earlier). Indeed, noting the anti-utopian inclinations of much of Dostoevsky's fiction, M. Keith Booker has argued that

while it might not be strictly accurate to describe any of the individual works of Dostoevsky literally as dystopian fictions, his works anticipate the modern development of dystopian fiction in striking ways. Much of Dostoevsky's work arises directly from a sense that the idealistic visions of nineteenth-century thinkers like N. G. Chernyshevsky might lead not to utopian dreams but to dystopian nightmares. (*Dystopian Literature* 64)

Booker goes on to note that Dostoevsky was an important influence on later writers of dystopian fiction such as Evgeny Zamyatin and to identify many of the dystopian energies in Dostoevsky works such as *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), *The House of the Dead* (1862), and *Devils* (1872), the latter of which features a group of would-be revolutionaries influenced by the socialist utopianism of Fourier, which had itself been an important influence on the young Dostoevsky.

In a somewhat similar mode, Gary Saul Morson, in *The Boundaries of Genre*, has argued that Dostoevsky's *A Writer's Diary* (a massive compilation of pieces written mostly in the 1870s but not published as a book until the English translation of 1993–1994) also engages in a dialogue with the tradition of utopian and dystopian fiction. For Morson (clearly influenced by Bakhtin), *A Writer's Diary* can be regarded as a key specimen of what Morson calls a “meta-utopia,” that is, a work suspended between the poles of utopia and anti-utopia, encouraging readers to weigh the poles against one another in a productive dialogue, without reaching a final conclusion in favor of one or the other. Morson suggests that the central strategy of meta-utopias is parody, though it is a particularly rich and dialogic form of parody that leaves readers uncertain of whether the critical energies of the parody are directed at utopian idealism or at dystopian critiques of that idealism (175-85).

Morson's reading of *A Writer's Diary* is particular apt for my purposes, because what he sees as an unfinalizable dialogue between the “utopian” and the “anti-utopian” is, from my point of

view (taken from Jameson via Bloch), precisely the essence of the utopian. If the utopia is always the not yet, and if the most successful utopias are the ones that most clearly call attention to their own failure, then Morson's vision of a utopian text that is at the same time a critique of utopia is in fact the best utopia of all. Similarly, from the point of view of Sartrean existentialism, the process of becoming and of moving toward freedom and the being-for-itself is a never-ending one that must constantly challenge its own premises in order to continue the forward movement and to avoid calcification in facticity and the being-in-itself.

In terms of existentialism, *Notes from Underground* is probably the single Dostoevsky text that has been discussed most extensively. The Underground Man's recognition of the meaninglessness of existence has led many to view him as a forerunner of modern existentialism, though most typically as a forerunner of the nihilistic/pessimistic strain of existentialism that has been associated with philosophers such as Kierkegaard, rather than the far more optimistic existentialism of Sartre.² And it is certainly the case that the Underground Man feels that, in a world that has no real meaning, any attempt to find meaning is for him both futile and unseemly, a demonstration of one's own stupidity. However, even he acknowledges that it might be nice to have some meaning in his life, as when he declares his wish that his lack of action could be attributed to his laziness, given that laziness would at least be *something*, while he himself feels that he is nothing, something that the text itself seems to acknowledge by leaving him without a proper name:

Oh, if I were doing nothing only out of laziness. Lord, how I'd respect myself then. Respect myself precisely because I'd at least be capable of having laziness in me; there would be in me at least one, as it were, positive quality, which I myself could be sure of. (19)

Indeed, if one looks at *Notes from Underground* from a Sartrean perspective, one's immediate impression of its notoriously unstable and unreliable narrator is of a character who

almost entirely fails to achieve Sartre's vision of a successful individual who faces his own freedom and takes charge of the narrative of his life. As Booker has noted, in constructing his narration the Underground Man "desperately strives to find a narrative form in which he can make sense of his experience but finds his life hopelessly fragmented, his inability to connect one moment to the next clearly illustrating the problematic sense of temporal continuity" that is typical of his plight (*Joyce* 193).³ Shoring fragments against his ruin, the Underground Man desperately seeks a narrative strategy that will hold his experience together.

One of the main reasons why he finds this project difficult is his intense self-awareness and his conscious understanding that the narratives he constructs are not his own authentic creations but are in fact simply borrowed from the past, generally from the literary past. The Underground Man is extremely well read and cannot seem to avoid using literary models for his own constructions, only to become disgusted when he realizes that his visions and fantasies are not original. As Michael André Bernstein puts it, *Notes from Underground* is essentially a "pastiche of countless prior texts, in part because that is all the Underground Man himself really consists of, except for his additional burden of finding this existence-as-pastiche intolerable" (215). For example, at one point in the text, the Underground Man entertains a lengthy fantasy of revenge against his old nemesis Zverkov, only to stop and admit that of course the entire fantasy is taken straight from Pushkin's "*Silvio* and Lermontov's *Masquerade*" (85). Feeling mortified at this recognition of his own lack of originality, he stops the coach in which he is riding, steps out, and stands motionless in the street, his suddenly stationary condition mirroring his own sense that there is really no point in doing anything at all.

The Underground Man fails to find a successful narrative in which to embed his experience, partly because he has so many narratives to draw upon (from his extensive reading)

and partly because his intense self-consciousness leaves him all too aware of the fact that the models he draws upon are fictional and not really applicable to his real-life situation. Essentially the opposite of Flaubert's Emma Bovary (but much more in the mode of Nabokov's Humbert Humbert), the Underground Man is crippled not from an inability to distinguish between reality and fiction but by an awareness of the difference so powerful that it overwhelms him, leaving him bitterly resentful of the fact that he must live in reality when in fact it would be much easier to be a character in fiction.⁴ To draw again upon Marx, the Underground Man fails to make his own history because he concentrates more on resenting the conditions under which he must make that history than on attempting to make his history under the conditions that have been thrust upon him. He finds his conditions insufferable and untenable. So he opts out of attempting to make his history under those conditions and instead struggles toward freedom the only way he knows how: by railing against his inability to do so.

As a result, according to Bernstein, the Underground Man's central emotional experience is one of bitterness and *ressentiment*, making him a very modern figure. Booker, for example, has seen him as an important forerunner of Joyce's Stephen Daedalus (especially in the way his consciousness is so powerfully informed by his reading from literature), and any number of critics have identified the characterization of Underground Man as a key aspect of the various ways Dostoevsky's work, however much it might strive to look back to the Russian past, actually looks forward to the literary future, and especially to literary modernism (*Joyce* 193). This, of course, was anything but Dostoevsky's own intention. In fact, he no doubt intends for the experience of the Underground Man to be a warning against the negative impact of modern Western thought, which might seem to offer avenues toward genuine individual freedom but instead traps the individual in false narratives that lead to dead ends bereft of spiritual fulfillment.

That *Notes from Underground* seems so contemporary to so many modern readers suggests that the movement forward is inexorable—and the fact that Dostoevsky’s own work seems to contribute to that movement, however inadvertently—suggests just how powerful this forward historical movement really is. In this sense (Balzac is again the standard referent), Dostoevsky’s work contains a strong utopian component that is related to the text’s demonstration of the unstoppable forward march of history, which suggests that change, even fundamental systemic change, does indeed occur over time. This change might not always be in the direction that we would use or that most of us would identify as utopian, but the very fact of change, per Bloch, opens up important utopian opportunities. As long as things continually change, then there is always the chance that they might get better.

Now forty years old, the Underground Man ostensibly sees no hope of such change. He is a former civil servant and thus can claim Gogol’s Akaky as one of his forerunners. However, as opposed to Akaky’s calm acceptance of his fate to work in a routine and uncreative position, the Underground Man has left his job in disgust at the chafing routine to which he was exposed there, subsequently living in a squalid room on a small inheritance from the death of a distant relative. Unfortunately, his current practice of living in isolation and fuming at the world is just as routine and just as unfulfilling, except that it gives him more opportunity to rail against his fate—as he does throughout his “notes” that make up the text. He is a nineteenth-century man without qualities, a hollow man living far before the characters of Musil and Eliot, something that he himself diagnoses quite accurately: “An intelligent man of the nineteenth century must be and is morally obliged to be primarily a characterless being” (5). As Bakhtin puts it, the Underground Man is composed of pure self-consciousness in its own right, rather than consciousness *of* anything:

The Underground Man not only dissolves in himself all possible fixed features of his person, making them all the object of his introspection, but in fact he no longer has any such traits at all, not fixed definitions, there is nothing to say about him, he figures not as a person taken from life but rather as the subject of consciousness and dream. (*Problems* 51).

Using Sartre's terminology, the Underground Man's intense self-consciousness is a clear achievement, a clear step forward into genuine humanity and beyond the condition of the animals whom the Underground Man himself often evinces as examples of a lack of self-consciousness and freedom to determine one's own identity and path. The problem is that the Underground Man has moved beyond this initial animalistic condition but has failed to move forward to the next step of taking positive action to define himself, thus leaving himself without definition. The Underground Man, one might say, is trapped in the moment of nothingness that succeeds the nihilation of the Being-in-itself, but he has yet been unable to move forward into the ongoing process of production of a new self in the movement toward the Being-for-itself. He himself, of course, is intensely aware of this entrapment, complaining bitterly of the sense of "inertia" that leaves him feeling that he lacks the energy to change his life, however much he might recognize the desirability of such change.

One is again tempted to read the predicament of this character as a sort of historical allegory, and in fact as a sort of national allegory of the kind envisioned by Jameson. However, whereas Jameson envisions national allegory largely within the context of the successful opposition to European colonial rule in the Third World, the Underground Man here would appear to be an allegory of failure—in particular of the failure of Russia, having moved beyond a purely medieval mode of production and social relations, to complete the process and to move forward into modernity. As a comparison, one might say that Gogol's Akaky is, in terms of historical allegory, trapped in the process of reproducing pre-existing documents and thus mired in an

endless repetition of the past. In Sartrean terms, Akaky and the Underground Man are both frozen in place: Akaky fails to transcend his initial facticity and being-in-itself. The Underground Man takes the process a step farther, moving beyond his initial facticity (which resembles that of Akaky) through the nihilation of his original Being-in-itself but failing to take the next step into the positive production of a new being-for-itself.⁵

In this sense, it is highly relevant that Bakhtin sees the Underground Man (and other Dostoevsky characters of a similar type) as a direct descendent of Gogol's clerk who has moved one step forward in the evolution of the representation of self-consciousness as a character trait. Whereas the Gogolian clerk is purely static, the Underground Man, for Bakhtin, is "occupied primarily with the task of becoming conscious, the sort of hero whose life would be concentrated on the pure function of gaining consciousness of himself and the world" (*Problems* 50). Of course, the Underground Man has become *so* concentrated on gaining consciousness that it becomes his whole existence, leaving him little room to take action in the exterior world outside his own mind.

In his interactions with others, for example, the Underground Man has little hope of establishing meaningful relationships, which would, according to Sartre, provide a key venue for him to develop his own viable identity, but would also, among other things, require him to recognize and acknowledge that they are genuine human beings like himself. Instead, he views others largely as extensions of his own self-consciousness, his concerns with them residing largely in his fantasies of how they might see him. The only satisfaction these fantasies bring him is the confidence that he is a step ahead of other people, that no one else can possibly entertain any negative thoughts about him that he has not already had himself.

Disgusted with himself and filled with self-loathing, the Underground Man nevertheless feels himself to be far more intelligent than those around him, who lack the vision to see just how small and pointless their lives really are. However, he finds his own intelligence to be a curse, because it simply makes him aware of how dismal his life is, aware that he lives in a world of degraded meanness, yet one in which there is no point to trying to improve one's lot. Indeed, his worst source of humiliation is the recognition: "there is not only nothing you can do to change yourself, but there is simply nothing to do at all" (8). So he sits and stewes, lamenting not only his sad condition but the fact that he is intelligent enough to realize just how sad and hopeless his condition really is.

Hating himself (and always taking pleasure in his own pain), the Underground Man tends intentionally to provoke others to abuse and mistreat him, so that these experiences can confirm his diagnosis of the misery of his condition. He thus finds it particularly hard to deal with the saintly Liza, who (much in the mode of Sonia from the nearly contemporaneous *Crime and Punishment*), approaches him in a mode of self-sacrificing Christian love and devotion. Indeed, the Underground Man himself seems to anticipate the fate of Sonia when he constructs a bitter fantasy of the future life as a prostitute that he sees as awaiting Liza, a narrative he constructs specifically to bring her pain and to aid him in his effort to establish his domination over her, all human relations for him seemingly consisting of domination and submission.

Ironically, he constructs this narrative (which makes Liza sound like a character in a Dostoevsky novel) in bitter response to Liza's observation that his speech sounds like something "from a book" (98). His bitterness, of course, comes largely from his recognition that she is absolutely correct, and he himself soon admits that speaking like something from a book is the only mode of speech of which he is capable, situation that he finds highly frustrating, but

unavoidable (103). Liza reacts so violently to his predictions of her future degradations that even the Underground Man is momentarily affected, but he quickly recovers and assures himself that he has simply made an effective move in the “game” of dominating her.

Returning to the notion of historical allegory, Dostoevsky, of course, was by this time committed to the notion that moving beyond the system of medieval Russia was a moral loss and an historical mistake, and so his vision of the failure of the Underground Man, read as historical allegory, is surely not that the character has failed to become fully Westernized but that he has become just Westernized enough to have lost his identity as a traditional Russian. It is fairly clear that Dostoevsky intends us to see the true tragedy of the Underground Man to lie in the fact that he has been so heavily influenced (one might say contaminated) by the Western rationalist philosophy against which he himself rails so bitterly.

From the point of view of Jameson’s own theorization of utopia, however, the failure of the Underground Man to complete the process of self-realization and move forward into the process of self-identification can serve as a helpful reminder of the difficult and painful process that historical transformation is bound to be. At the same time, the Underground Man’s baleful predicament can be taken as a demonstration of the importance of moving boldly forward in the historical process and dragging Mother Russia into the modern era, with all that this process of modernization entails.

The Underground Man’s acute awareness that he cannot achieve the identity he would like to have (which is part of the intense self-consciousness that marks him overall as a character) means that his central experience is one of failure—precisely in the sense that Jameson sees failure at the heart of any legitimate utopian project. On the other hand given his own sense that there is no point to trying to improve or change anything, it comes as no surprise that the Underground

Man is completely dismissive of the kinds of utopian schemes that were so popular in the nineteenth century. Such schemes, he argues, rob individual human beings of their distinctive identities, making them merely cogs in a bigger social machine and depriving them even of the pleasure of resenting the world and the people around him, a pleasure that is the main consolation of his life.

The Underground Man is particularly incensed by the image of the Crystal Palace, a utopian image that repeatedly appears in Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* as a gleaming emblem of the forward-looking utopian possibilities of modernity. Indeed, the Crystal Palace itself was designed and constructed precisely to convey such an image. A cast-iron and glass structure that was quite futuristic for its time, the Crystal Palace was originally built in 1851 in London's Hyde Park to house the Great Exhibition, a sort of early World's Fair that was intended to tout the virtually unlimited ability of modern capitalism to remake the world through its transforming power. Fully titled "The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations," the event featured exhibits of the latest technology and products from around the world, though it was of course strongly informed by the jingoistic purpose of demonstrating that British capitalist modernity was just a bit more capitalist and a bit more modern than anyone else's, including France's which had been touted in the somewhat similar French Industrial Exposition of 1844. However nationalistic its underlying premise, the Crystal Palace was undeniably utopian in its emphasis on the wonders of modern technology and the promise of more wonders to come.

Indeed, London's Crystal Palace, filtered through the utopian philosophy of Fourier, inspired one of the central utopian visions of Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* Here, Chernyshevsky uses the Crystal Palace as an important model for what he envisions as the ideal living space of the utopian future and as an emblem of the triumph of human ingenuity over nature,

of order over chaos. Order is, for the Underground Man, the key to all utopian societies, which he believes can function only if all aspects of the society are kept in a perfect, rigidly defined order. Order, however, is something that he generally finds oppressive, spiritually impoverishing, and dehumanizing, and he is horrified by the whole notion of a rationally ordered universe in which all phenomena obey fixed physical rules and in which one event leads to another by a determinate series of cause-and-effect relationships.

Far from finding a rationalist universe in which all events obey scientifically discoverable laws to be comforting and reassuring, the Underground Man focuses on this kind of rationalist/scientific view of the universe as one of the key targets that he rails against throughout his *ressentiment*-filled notes. The scientific view of the universe (and of human beings) for him reduces humans to the condition of unthinking machines, making a person little more than “a sort of piano key or a sprig in an organ” (24). On this view, he says, human beings are deprived of all responsibility for their actions, which occur simply according to fixed mathematical laws. Of course, he goes on, these laws will also deprive human beings of all wanting, of all desire, so that they will merely sleep-walk through life like zombies or automatons, all needs having been met, but no true fulfillment having been achieved, because they will have no need to struggle for anything.

Once these laws are discovered and understood (a project that he views as lying at the heart of all scientific endeavors)

all human actions will then be calculated according to these laws, mathematically, like a table of logarithms, up to 108,000, and entered into a calendar; or, better still, some well-meaning publications will appear, like the present-day encyclopedic dictionaries, in which everything will be so precisely calculated and designated that there will no longer be any actions or adventures in the world. (24)

In this sense, it is telling that one of the Underground Man's greatest frustrations is the simple mathematical insistence by others that $2 + 2$ must always equal 4 under any and all circumstances. Such determinate rules, for him reduce humans to the status of machines or animals, even insects, blindly following their natures and deprived of all free will. Thus, one of the Underground Man's central images in criticizing utopian schemes is that of the "anthill," which he envisions as a metaphor for the kind of regimented lives that individuals would have to live in order to render any utopia functional. Human beings, he argues in a seemingly anti-utopian mode, are instinctively repelled by such order. Thus, while they might be attracted to the idea of constructing such well-ordered edifices as the Crystal Palace, it is in the nature of humans to flee such edifices once they are built, finding it oppressive to live in them. Maybe, he says of such a structure, a human being "only likes creating it, not living in it" (33). On the other hand, he argues that ants, blindly obedient to instinct and having no interest in making their own decisions about how to live their lives, are perfectly content both to toil away building their rigidly structured anthill and to live the rest of their lives in this same unvarying structure. In contrast, he declares,

man is a frivolous and unseemly being, and perhaps, similar to the chess player, likes only the process of achieving the goal, but not the goal itself. And who knows (one cannot vouch for it), perhaps the whole goal mankind strives for on earth consists just in this ceaselessness of the process of achievement alone, that is to say, in life itself, and not essentially in the goal, which, of course, is bound to be nothing other than two times two equals four. (33)

This elevation of process over product, of striving toward a goal rather than actually reaching it, is not that far from the utopian "not-yet" of Ernst Bloch, however far the nasty tone of the Underground Man might seem to be from the warm-hearted humanism of Bloch. From this point of view, the Underground Man's disgust-filled diatribes take on a much more positive tone. In a similar way, the Crystal Palace, that image of futuristic perfection, is for the Underground Man actually an image of sterility and of the removal of all interest and variety in life. Far from

being an image of all desires fulfilled, it serves for him as an image of all desires (and thus all genuine motivation) removed:

You believe in a crystal edifice, forever indestructible, that is, in an edifice at which one can neither put out one's tongue on the sly nor make a fig in the pocket. Well, and perhaps I'm afraid of this edifice precisely because it is crystal and forever indestructible, and it will be impossible to put out one's tongue at it even on the sly. (35)⁶

Here, the Underground Man makes clear that he is especially appalled by the Chernyshevsky's version of the Crystal Palace because it is envisioned to be an ever-lasting and unchanging structure, conceived in perfection and thus requiring no updating or improvement. However trapped and paralyzed the Underground Man might seem to be by his own bitterness and *ressentiment*, the fact remains that he sees the possibility of change as an essential element of any genuinely human existence.

The Underground Man's viciously negative attitude toward scientific rationalism is not, in his notes, clearly aligned with religious devotion, though religion is clearly a central source of Dostoevsky's own animosity toward the scientific worldview⁷. Moreover, as the Underground Man quite clearly identifies scientific rationalism as the source of meaninglessness in a world that has been stripped of magic in the mode later described by Weber, an unstated subtext, one could argue that his diatribes imply an unstated assumption that a return to religion might also enable a return to a meaningful existence. By leaving this conclusion unstated, though, Dostoevsky also allows readers to develop their own ideas about how meaningfulness might be restored, including ideas that are far to the left of Dostoevsky's own—and even including ideas that are perfectly well in line with Marxist utopianism, especially if that utopianism is viewed in conjunction with Sartrean existentialism.

For example, while the Underground Man's animosity toward Chernyshevsky's socialist-inspired Crystal Palace and all it represents would seem most obviously to be a reactionary diatribe against utopianism and even against modernity itself (and in favor of a return to the Russian past), the fact that the real-world Crystal Palace was a monument to a specifically *capitalist* version of modernity also renders it suspect from a socialist perspective. London's Crystal Palace and the exhibition it housed was visited approvingly by such luminaries as Charles Darwin and Charles Dickens—but also by large numbers of London's unwashed, underfed poor. It was thus, inadvertently, as much a reminder of capitalist inequality as it was a celebration of capitalist innovation, a point that is driven home quite effectively in George Gissing's *The Nether World* (1889), which dramatizes such visits to the structure by the poor amid a generally skeptical treatment of the whole notion of utopian schemes to help the less fortunate (which tend, in the book, to lead to disastrous results, no matter how well-intentioned).

If the Underground Man clearly sees the Crystal Palace as a symbol of the folly of all utopian dreams, it should be recalled that capitalism itself contains powerful utopian components, especially in its emergent phase. Thus, the Underground Man's dismantling of Chernyshevsky has proved inspirational to a number of modern writers of dystopian fiction, most of whom write in a progressive spirit of opposition to repressive political regimes. Booker, for example, has argued that it is no accident that all of the structures in the dystopian One State of Evgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924) are made of glass, a motif that Booker identifies as a reference to the Underground Man's (and Dostoevsky's) skepticism toward Chernyshevsky's vision of the palace of crystal as “a prototype of the rational technological utopian of the future” (*Dystopian Impulse* 26). Similarly, Robert Louis Jackson has argued that the One State “could be regarded as a realization of the utopia outlined by the Underground Man”—and in fact numerous aspects of Dostoevsky's work

have been variously identified as having exerted an influence on Zamyatin's dystopian vision (150).

Granted, Zamyatin's dystopian classic has generally been seen as a critique of the postrevolutionary regime in the Soviet Union, as it most certainly is. However, Zamyatin's own perspective was quite radical, and his critique of the new Soviet state came from the left, rather than from the right. His skepticism was aimed not toward the socialist goals of the revolution so much as toward the bureaucratic apparatus that was being put in place in the presumed pursuit of those goals. Zamyatin, like Leon Trotsky, was a proponent of perpetual revolution, of the notion that revolutionary goals could never be reached but only sought, because once goals were declared reached, the revolution would tend to calcify into conservatism. In the essay "On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters" (1923), Zamyatin clearly outlines his disaster for dogmatic thinking of any kind and (in particular) his strong support for the concept of ongoing revolution, which he sees as a fundamental condition of nature, making opposition to revolution itself unnatural:

Revolution is everywhere, in everything. It is infinite. There is no final revolution, no final number. The social revolution is only one of an infinite number of numbers; the law of revolution is not a social law, but an immensely greater one. It is a cosmic, universal law—like the laws of conservation of energy and of the dissipation of energy (entropy). (*Soviet* 107-8)

Here, of course, Zamyatin differs from Dostoevsky in that he does not see science as dehumanizing and inherently repressive⁸; indeed, for Zamyatin science can be a powerful tool for revolutionary change. He does, however, challenge notions of scientific certainty, seeing science as an every-questioning mode that continually seeks new ideas and new knowledge and that is always open to revision, even of the most radical sort.⁹

Zamyatin's own concerns might have been aimed primarily at the Soviet Union, but it should be recalled that the major historical example of the turn from revolution to conservatism that concerns Zamyatin was, in fact, the bourgeois cultural revolution of Western Europe, which swept away the medieval order by the early nineteenth century, then hardened into resistance to all further fundamental systemic change by the end of that same century. In any case, Zamyatin's understanding of Dostoevsky's *Underground Man* as an important forerunner of the radical doctrine of perpetual revolution might at first seem surprising, but the *Underground Man*'s fierce opposition to anything permanent or unchanging (while couched in almost entirely negative terms) can also be taken as a positive affirmation of impermanence and ongoing change.

In any case, while it is helpful to read *We* through *Notes from Underground*, the reverse is also true, and Zamyatin's espousal of the notion of perpetual revolution can be used to illuminate the *Underground Man*'s revulsion toward scientific rationality, which can also be read as a horror of excessive rigidity, order, and stagnation and as an attempt to embrace the notion of freedom, disorder, and ongoing change. From this point of view, the *Underground Man*'s narrative (or non-narrative) suddenly seems less like a bitter expression of frustration and paralysis and more like the rambunctious shenanigans of a writer such as Rabelais, Bakhtin's central example (other than Dostoevsky) of the carnivalesque in literature¹⁰. Bakhtin, of course, has also identified Menippean satire (as exemplified by the work of Rabelais) as perhaps the most important generic carrier of the carnivalesque, while (surprisingly to many) arguing that Dostoevsky is one of the most important writers of Menippean satire in the modern era. Even more interesting is the fact that Bakhtin identifies *Notes from Underground* as one of the best examples of Menippean satire in Dostoevsky's entire *oeuvre*, listing the numerous characteristics of the genre that are prominent in the text (*Problems* 154–55).¹¹

If his notes are viewed as Menippean satire, the Underground Man's seeming entrapment in the moment of nihilation takes on much of the character of the timeless moment of escape from history that Bakhtin associates with the carnival. For Bakhtin, the carnival is a moment of suspension of rules and order and hierarchy of all kinds and thus a moment with great transgressive potential that can produce a defamiliarized (and potentially subversive) perspective on the usual order of things. However skeptical Bakhtin critics such as Morson and Emerson might be of Bakhtin's obvious vision of the carnival as a utopian image, it is a utopian image nonetheless.¹² Michael Gardiner, for example, grants that Bakhtin may intend his discussion of the medieval carnival (and its subversion of the humorless and repressive power structure of medieval Europe) at least partly as a displaced critique of an equally humorless Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union. In any case, Gardiner concludes that Bakhtin "projects an almost entirely positive—indeed, utopian—image of carnival and related folk-festive practices" (181). Further, Gardiner sees a similar utopian optimism in Bakhtin's discussion of the novel (here disagreeing with Morson and Emerson's vision of Bakhtin's theory of the novel as anti-utopian), concluding that the "central shortcoming" of Bakhtin's work in a political sense is that he "seriously overestimates the capacity of dialogic literature and popular culture to effect the liberation of human consciousness from the grip of monologism" (176).

In this sense, Dostoevsky might be more dialogic than Bakhtin himself, because his Underground Man, however much his consciousness might be composed of a patchwork of quotations from various literary works, is also quite skeptical of the ability of this literature to help him face his life (or achieve the freedom he seems to desire) in any practical sense. Yet if Bakhtin sees literature itself (or at least certain *kinds* of carnivalized literature) as a utopian realm that provides an alternative perspective and context from which to view reality in a defamiliarized way,

reading the Underground Man (who spends so much of his own time in the world of literature) through Bakhtin suggests that he might not be simply paralyzed, but just temporarily suspended in a realm from which he might someday return with greater enlightenment.

Indeed, his seemingly paralyzed plight can be taken as a demonstration of the folly of paralysis and a positive declaration of the value of forward-looking action. By the end of the text, the Underground Man has achieved nothing—except even more disgust with himself for the seemingly pointless activity of having composed his notes in the first place. But compose his notes he does, apparently endlessly (like the quest for freedom in Sartre or the quest for utopia in Bloch), though the frame “editor” interrupts the discourse at the end and mercifully announces that “this may be a good place to stop” (130).

Famously, the Underground Man begins his narrative by declaring himself to be a “sick man,” though his illness is primarily of a moral and spiritual sort, rather than a physical one. Lack of health is also the principal characteristic that defines the predicament of the protagonist of Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, though in this case the illness is a physical one that has (apparently, though the story can be read in a variety of ways) been induced by injury. Moreover, as the title of Tolstoy’s novella indicates, the illness of Ivan Ilyich is a fatal one, bringing his narrative to one of the classic conclusions of the realist novel (the other is marriage) in the death of the protagonist. This classic closure is indicative of the way in which, at first glance, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* could not be more different from *Notes from Underground* in terms of either form or content. Reading the texts through Sartrean existentialism (supplemented by a consistent awareness of Marxist historicism) reveals, however, just how closely akin these texts really are—to the extent that Tolstoy’s story might even be taken as a sort of sequel to Dostoevsky’s. Indeed, despite the common tendency to think of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as the

opposed poles of Russian realism, *Ivan Ilyich* in fact has much more in common with *Notes from Underground* than it does with *War and Peace*.

This suggestion that *Ivan Ilyich* might have something in common with the unruly narratives of the Menippean tradition is somewhat at odds with the seemingly straightforward way in which the story is based on the biography of the protagonist. In addition to the importance of such biographical models for Sartre's understanding of how we view history (which I discussed in Chapter 4 above) such biography-based narratives are central to what Peter Brooks has described as the tendency to seek closure in their own deaths. For Brooks, many classic narratives are based on a momentum that can be compared to the Freudian death drive, bringing the narrative inexorably toward its close, though perhaps with the operation of subplots and digressions along the way to make things more interesting:

What operates in the text through repetition is the death instinct, the drive toward the end [...] As Sartre and Benjamin compellingly argued, the narrative must tend toward its end, seek illumination in its own death. Yet this must be the right death, the correct end. ... The desire of the text (the desire of reading) is hence desire for the end, but desire for the end reached only through the at least minimally complicated detour, the intentional deviance, in tension, which is the plot of narrative. (102–3)

The reference here is to Sartre's autobiography, *The Words*, in which Sartre describes his decision to live his life as if looking back on it from the time of his death, which would confer a meaning on his otherwise meaningless existence: "I chose as my future the past of a great immortal and I tried to live backwards. I became completely posthumous" (199).

However classic it might be to end a narrative with the death of the protagonist, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* actually begins that way, with the titular death announced in the initial chapter, a brilliant set piece in which Tolstoy sets the stage for the story leading to the death by describing the reactions of Ivan's wife and colleagues to his demise, reactions that illustrate how

conventional, self-serving, and inauthentic their behavior is in the wake of the death of their husband and colleague. The death is announced, for example, when several of Ivan's colleagues read the obituary posted by the widow, an announcement that is itself a masterpiece of cliché that follows the expected form, conveys the proper information, and shows no genuine emotion whatsoever. It might have been composed by a machine, or at least by a stranger with no relation whatsoever to the deceased:

Praskovya Fyodorovna Golovina with deep sorrow informs family and friends of the passing of her beloved spouse Ivan Ilyich Golovin, member of the Court of Justice, which took place on the 4th of February of the year 1882. The funeral will be on Friday at 1 p.m. (28)

The colleagues, meanwhile, react to this emotionless announcement with a similar lack of emotion, immediately wondering how the death, clearing a space in the bureaucratic hierarchy,¹³ might play out in terms of opening opportunities for promotion for themselves or their friends. The news, we are told by the story's stoic, but wittily ironic narrator, also evoked "as always" a sense of relief that Ivan had died, and not they. And, of course, they are annoyed at the "tedious requirements of etiquette" that will require them to attend various services associated with the death and to behave there in the expected way (29).

What follows is then a brilliantly comic segment—famously described by Randall Jarrell as an "overture in the key of falsehood" (xxvii)—in which Tolstoy's narrator depicts the widow and the other mourners attending the body and executing an elaborate social dance, far more concerned about behaving in the proper and expected manner and in saying all the right things than in showing any genuine signs of grief. Further, the widow seems less concerned with the prospect of living life without the companionship of her beloved husband than of living without his solidly middle-class income. The widow, for example, remembers how unpleasant Ivan's final suffering had been for her (rather than for him), then asks one of his colleagues about her

eligibility to receive a government pension now that her husband has expired—a situation that she has in fact clearly already researched in great detail, though she endeavors to hide that fact in the midst of her inquiries.

The mourners then quickly return to their normal lives without giving Ivan a second thought, indicating the superficial nature of their sorrow, something that by this time is no surprise at all, because this first chapter has already made clear just how superficial, self-serving, and convention-bound their behavior really is. Indeed, while it might have been the great earlier novels such as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* (1878) that made Tolstoy's reputation as a chronicler, on a large scale, of nineteenth-century Russian society, this chapter (in a less literary and more straightforward way) captures in a nutshell the thoroughly inauthentic and conformist nature of a society driven by bourgeois striving for financial gain but lacking in the historical energies of the Western European bourgeoisie. The book is filled with frequently repeated terms such as “decorum” and “*comme il faut*,” the frequent repetition of which indicates the excessive concern with properness and procedure that marks the behavior of this prematurely decadent bourgeoisie, the repeated use of the French phrase suggesting especially the pretentiousness with which they go through the motions of the performance of their daily roles, which have been established at least partly in mimicry of the West European bourgeoisie.¹⁴

The faux-bourgeois level of Russian society occupied by Ivan and his associates is thoroughly dominated by convention, as each person strives to do what is expected of him or her. In Sartrean terms, it is a society steeped in facticity, as each person strives not to break free of the bonds of tradition, but in fact to tighten those bonds about themselves, thus avoiding the need to deal with the freedom to which they would otherwise be condemned. In Chapter 2 *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* switches to a brief narration of the *life* of Ivan Ilyich, which eventually takes up

roughly the rest of the first half of the novella. This background story makes it clear that, up until the time of his ultimately fatal accident, he, too, spent his life trying to do the expected, hoping to thereby gain a certain amount of wealth and prestige. The son of a civil servant, Ivan has simply extended the family tradition of working in the notorious Russian bureaucracy by entering the law, eventually working himself up to the position of a judge in the Court of Justice by doing all the expected things and by (when necessary) exerting a little inside influence to receive favorable treatment. Working his way up, he “strictly did,” we are told, “what he considered his duty, and he considered his duty to be everything that it was considered to be by his superiors” (40).

Ivan, in particular, is caught up in the peculiarly hybrid nature of nineteenth-century Russian society. On the one hand, he is surrounded by a devotion to tradition and convention that generates a particularly strong facticity from which it is difficult to break free. On the other hand, he (and most of the others of his class) have been infected with the disease of bourgeois striving, feeling that they must constantly rise both in their professional positions and in their social status, along with gaining the increased material wealth that these ascents entail. At one point, for example, Ivan is promoted to a new job with a higher salary, allowing him to move his family into a much larger apartment. The move, however, is not toward a special life, but simply into greater conformism; Ivan’s desires are not really his own, but are simply dictated to him by the expectations of the society around him. He simply wants what he thinks he is supposed to want.

The new apartment, for example, is described as being

the same as the houses of all people who are not so rich but want to be like the rich and so are only like one another: brocade, ebony, flowers, carpets, and bronzes, everything dark and shiny—everything that all people of a certain type do to be like all people of a certain type. (55)

It is, in short, a showplace of bourgeois conformism, a spectacular demonstration of lack of imagination in decoration. Appropriately, it is this very concern with proper appearances that

eventually brings an end to Ivan's meaningless existence. Preparing to move into his new apartment, he puts in a great effort to ensure that every aspect of the apartment is just as it should be. At one point, he climbs a ladder to show a decorator just how some drapes should be hung, only to lose his footing and to fall, incurring the injury that will eventually kill him. It is a banal and unheroic accident that, at first, seems to leave him with an insignificant injury, and he will later become infuriated that such a thing has brought about his downfall. He feels virtually nothing at the time of the accident, but later a bothersome pain begins to grow in his side and eventually causes his death.

Still, at first, the sudden increase in Ivan's standard of living seems to be the fulfillment of a dream. Quickly, however, he discovers that the new house has "one room too few," while the new salary turns out to be perhaps 500 rubles too little to meet the ever-growing needs of Ivan and his family (56). This need to strive for more and more, only to find that one's desire remains unfulfilled and that there is still more to desire no matter how much one attains, is a familiar one to citizens of the twenty-first century, when the texture of life is so thoroughly dominated by the consumerist desire machine of late capitalism. Ivan's desire is less for things themselves than for the status they convey, so it is of a more nineteenth-century variety, but it is still identifiable as a result of the incursion of capitalism into an otherwise tradition-bound Russia. Interestingly, the never-ending cycle of desire, followed by seeming fulfillment, followed by even more desire, that is so typical of capitalism clearly parallels the never-ending striving for utopia of Ernst Bloch, which (as I have already noted) quite closely resembles the ongoing process of striving for the being-for-itself (which constantly then falls back into the being-in-itself and thus must be transcended once more) that is the nature of the free life according to Sartrean existentialism. The difference, however, is that the quest for status, wealth,

or commodities that is the texture of life under capitalism is a false quest for that which has no real meaning and which will, in fact, entrap the individual and prevent him or her from achieving freedom.

The quests outlined by Bloch and Sartre, however, can at least potentially lead to genuine transcendence and to a genuinely better life. The quest that has driven Ivan's life (and that continues to drive the lives of his wife and colleagues after his death) is, in fact, a classic example of the phenomenon that Sartre refers to as "bad faith," in which the individual strives for an identity not that will allow him to achieve the being-for-itself based on the pursuit of goals of his own making, but simply one that will allow him to "succeed" by meeting the expectations and demands of the society around him, often in a mode of false consciousness that makes the individual believe he is being driven by his own goals and desires.

The protagonist of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* blindly follows the expectations of his society, trapped in a facticity that can offer him a certain amount of material success, but no genuine enlightenment or fulfillment. This facticity also offers him little room to appreciate the genuine subjectivity of others, who are to him simply objects to help him in the pursuit of his false goals. Many of his relations with others consist simply in trying to impress those of a higher station and who might be in a position to help him in his own career. When he marries, he does so as much because he believes it is what his superiors expect him to do as it is because he finds his new wife pleasant to be around (46). And, as the marriage proceeds, he attempts to establish a relationship with his wife that outsiders can look upon with approval, because "in order to do one's duty—that is, to lead a decorous life that is approved of by society—one has to develop a defined relationship as one does with one's work" (48). For her own part, Praskovya Fyodorovna grows increasingly distant during the marriage. In fact, after Ivan falls into ill health as a result of

his accident, she comes increasingly to despise her husband and to blame him for what she sees as her unhappy life, refusing to take responsibility for her own freedom, but seeming to take a certain pleasure in feeling sorry for herself (61).

Because of his inability to define his illness, and the growing pain, which has no rational explanation, Ivan begins to view the world as hostile, indifferent to his suffering, a stance that, among other things, brings considerable discord with his spouse:

But it happened that this discomfort started to grow and to become not quite pain but the consciousness of a constant heaviness in his side accompanied by a mad mood. This bad mood, which got worse and wore, began to spoil the pleasant course of the easy and decorous life that had been established in the Golovin house. Husband and wife began to quarrel more and more often, and soon the ease and pleasantness disappeared and decorum was preserved, with difficulty. (60–61)

As Ivan's pain worsens and he begins to grow weaker, he of course consults doctors, including some famous ones—he himself being a very important man, after all. Ivan's encounters with the pompous (and seemingly ignorant) doctors is another of the text's brilliant set pieces of satire, as the narrator skewers these pretentious men for being so impressed by their own knowledge that they forget to learn anything about their actual patients. Among other things, the doctors, preoccupied with things such as Ivan's potential infected appendix or his possible "floating kidney," seem more concerned with Ivan's medical condition than with Ivan himself, thus verifying Michel Foucault's analysis of the ideological underpinnings of the modern medical system in *The Birth of the Clinic*.

Most importantly, Ivan himself realizes (somewhat with horror) that the doctors are treating his medical case very much in the same way that he has habitually treated the legal cases that have come before him in his court. For one thing, he recognizes that the pompousness of the attitudes of the doctors as they examine him and the "questions requiring predetermined and

clearly unnecessary answers” are highly familiar: “Everything was precisely as in court. Just as he in court put on an air towards the accused, so in precisely the same way the famous doctor put on an air toward him” (62).

The Birth of the Clinic is again here the obvious gloss, with its discussion of the way in which physical illness came to be marginalized, even criminalized as modern medicine evolved, making of patients essentially the same sort of delinquent as the lunatics, homosexuals, and criminals that Foucault discusses in the rest of his work. Foucault, citing an eighteenth-century treatise on epidemiology, traces the evolution of a “medical consciousness whose constant task would be to provide information, supervision, and constraint, all of which ‘relate as much to the police as to the field of medicine proper’” (26). In Ivan’s case, of course, this recognition is part of his growing consciousness of the inauthenticity of his former life, so that this parallel is for him not merely a commentary on the medical profession but also on himself. The doctors are just going through the motions and are not really engaged with their patients as human beings, not only as Ivan has done in court but also as he has essentially done throughout his life with others he has encountered, never really acknowledging their humanity but treating them as aspects of the facticity of his social context.

Gaining no relief from his medicines or from the advice of his imminent physicians, Ivan finds that his condition is becoming a nightmare in both the medical and the existential senses, his torment both physical and mental:

And with this knowledge, with the physical pain, and with the terror, he had to get into bed and often be unable to sleep from the pain the greater part of the night. And the next morning he had to get up again, dress, go to court, talk, write, or if he didn’t go to court he had to stay at home with those twenty-four hours of the day, each one of which was a torment. And he had to live like that on the brink of the abyss, all alone, without a single person who could understand and take pity on him. (70)

In the first half of the text, Ivan Ilyich lives his life according to the norms of his surroundings—working hard to establish a stable career in the government service, marrying, having children, and pursuing a higher standard of living. The satire in this segment of the story is particularly effective and rather sharp—partly because, as numerous critics have observed, the story is largely autobiographical,¹⁵ used by Tolstoy to show his own rejection of the way in which he himself lived the first decades of his adulthood. Ivan’s definition of his own identity is bound to acting by external circumstance. Thus he is reduced to the being-in-itself, which leads him to bad faith, “the paradoxical free decision to deny to ourselves this inescapable freedom” (Barlatier 22). Hence, Ivan assumes that his social role of conforming to social values is the essence of his being. He never experiences a moment of Being-for-itself, which is the nothingness of Being-in-itself, simply because he does not allow himself to separate himself from the Being-in-itself. Ivan’s essence is thus created within “a context of inherited norms and habitual expectations” (Miller 157).

Much of the second half of the text deals with the existential modes that Ivan undergoes as he attempts to deal with his approaching death: despair, isolation, abandonment, and anxiety. Without trying to genuinely seek self-definition, he “passively [supports] the prevailing social reality by refusing to depart from established patterns of behavior” (Miller 158). Although he goes through difficulties in the first half of the novella, such as the loss of some promotions and the death of some of his children, Ivan still mostly goes on with his life according to the same plan, living a sort of death in life.

In the second half (which essentially involves the *second* death of Ivan Ilyich), the protagonist feels completely abandoned. The doctors find his lack of recovery a mere inconvenience, while his family feels put off and even embarrassed by his lack of consideration

in having the audacity to be ill. Ivan resents their attitude and their inability to recognize the severity of his illness. He experiences a growing bitterness and *ressentiment*, simultaneously beginning to reject the foundations upon which he had built his former life and to resent others both for having pushed him in that false direction and for failing to be of any help now. Only the humble peasant Gerasim is of any comfort to him, and Ivan begins to idealize Gerasim as the only one around him who is living a genuinely authentic life, rather than simply trying to follow the rules of bourgeois propriety in order to further their own gain. Gerasim thus becomes the central overtly utopian image in the text.

There is, of course, a certain amount of class-based condescension in Ivan's vision of Gerasim as a natural man who does not bow to the rules of bourgeois decorum, just as there was perhaps a similar element of condescension in Tolstoy's own tendency to idealize the Russian peasantry later in his career. Still, despite the tendency toward irony, or even sarcasm, in the narrator of *Ivan Ilyich*, there is little reason to assume that either Tolstoy or Ivan is insincere in describing Gerasim as an admirable figure, doing his work (which increasingly involves caring for the declining Ivan) without complaint and looking upon Ivan's illness and impending death as natural parts of life rather than as the terrible and embarrassing inconveniences that Ivan's own family seems to feel that they are. Ivan, for his part, regards Gerasim, in Sartre's terms, as living an authentic life in the being-for-itself and refusing to attempt to advance his career (as Ivan himself had always done through the earlier part of his life) through the bad faith of falsely conforming to the rules of bourgeois decorum. Ivan greatly admires the young peasant for the purity of living his life in this way and begins to feel that Gerasim is the only person he can trust or with whom he can feel comfortable. Gerasim does not directly play a major role in the plot,

though his example can be seen as important in Ivan's growing realization of the inauthenticity of his own former life.

Ivan grows increasingly ill and weak, and he realizes that his wife, his daughter, and the doctors are all unwilling to admit the possibility that his death is approaching—not because they can't stand the idea of losing him, but simply because they do not wish to deal with the uncleanness of the illness and the unpleasantness of the death and all the arrangements it will entail. However, Ivan's developing pain and his consciousness of its severity allow him to view the world in a way different from how he used to. Ivan feels abandoned and that the whole universe is not concerned with him and cannot help him anyway:

He couldn't deceive himself: something terrible, new, and important was happening in him, something more important than anything that had happened to Ivan Ilyich in his life. And only he knew about this; all those around him either didn't understand or didn't want to understand and thought that everything in the world was going on as before. That was what tormented Ivan Ilyich most of all. He could see that his household—chiefly his wife and daughter who were in the full swing of visits and parties—understood nothing. (67–68)

Ivan has a strong sense that his illness separates him from others, who cannot possibly understand what he is going through. And he is correct, even though he does not at first realize that he has in fact always been alienated from those around him. His wife in particular feels put off by his illness, which she regards as a misfortune for *her*, something her inconsiderate husband is doing to her: “The whole illness was a new unpleasantness he was bringing down on his wife” (68).

Lying alone and in pain and unable to do much else, Ivan goes into a phase of great introspection in which he begins to gain the self-consciousness needed to transcend the facticity-bound constraints of his earlier life, though he still needs others to understand himself and his turmoil. He cannot completely separate himself from the others. As Sartre puts it, “I cannot

obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of another. The other is indispensable to my existence, and equally to any knowledge I can have of myself” (*Basic* 39). However, what makes Ivan embittered at his family, whom he still believes to be essentially a part of his own being, is his assumption that they should gain the same self-awareness that he has gained as a result of his illness. He wants his wife and children to live his pain, showing that he is in the process of realizing his freedom, but has not quite succeeded. Although self-conscious, Ivan is still not able to negate and surpass his resentment of his family and everyone around him. He wants to transform his family’s outlook on the world, but it is his responsibility first to shape his own essence and to transform himself. Thus Ivan must put the “I,” his subjective self, first, and the other in the object place.

Ivan’s anxiety isolates him from the normal world around him, and his illness makes him more conscious of his being. He comes to believe that he is dying, and he becomes anxious that he will soon meet the end of his existence. Ivan’s anxiety moves him toward the mode of being-for-itself, “the existence which will never stop negating itself” (Sartre, *Being* 137). Ivan is able to realize the reality of his situation through consciousness: “There is freedom only in a situation, and there is a situation only through freedom” (Sartre, *Being* 480).

Ivan’s facticity, his past, emerges as he starts to question his life (in light of his impending death) and whether he has actually lived it properly, as he had always believed he had. At the beginning Ivan tries to justify himself living life in accordance with social norms simply because he did not want to be alienated from his social circle, but he “suddenly felt the fragility of what he was defending. There was nothing to defend” (105). As he recalls his life, he becomes aware that everything he pursued was meaningless, and that he has done everything he

has done according to the values and norms and formalities of his social circle, without any regard for his own personal preferences or inclinations.

The text thus provides a strong critique of the conformism of Ivan's previous adult life, a conformism that can be recognized as thoroughly bourgeois in its nature given the way in which it is clearly designed to secure economic gain. *Ivan Ilyich* thus differs dramatically from the other Russian texts discussed in this dissertation in that it depicts bourgeois ideology as a conservative, rather than a progressive force, thus giving it much in common with nineteenth-century English fiction, except that Ivan ultimately breaks free of the confines of bourgeois ideology in ways that the protagonists of English novels from the period virtually never do. Of course, Tolstoy's text appeared two decades after the two Dostoevsky novels I discuss (and more than four decades after "The Overcoat"). It thus suggests the way in which, even in Russia, bourgeois ideology had become conservative by the 1880s, possibly under the influence of the growing conservatism of bourgeois ideology in Western Europe, but also no doubt reflecting certain realities of Russian history, where bourgeois ideology went conservative before ever having become successfully revolutionary. This situation gives bourgeois ideology in late-nineteenth-century some of the prematurely decadent quality of the postcolonial bourgeois ideology critiques by Fanon, while also helping to explain how Russia, historically, went from an essentially feudal system straight into a successful socialist-oriented revolution, without ever having passed through the capitalist phase that Marxist theory would previously have argued to be necessary.

Through negation Ivan rids himself of the self-deceit imposed upon him by his acceptance of the dictates of bourgeois ideology. He recalls his childhood, prior to his interpellation by this ideology, as perhaps the only happy phase of his life. His realization that he has not shaped his life with a meaningful essence causes him much turmoil as he nears his death,

and his condition leads him through an extended period in which his attitude is very much like that of Dostoevsky's Underground Man, intensely self-conscious that his life has meant nothing and intensely driven by *ressentiment* at those around him who appear to lack the intelligence to share this insight. It is in this sense that the text can be read as a sort of sequel to *Notes from Underground*, but Tolstoy's story extends Dostoevsky's to the next stage of existential enlightenment. Instead of going on endlessly in bitterness and despair, Ivan apparently reaches the closure of death—but first he also goes through a phase of transcendence that allows him to achieve the transcendence of the Being-for-itself.¹⁶

This transcendence, of course, is a difficult one that causes Ivan a great deal of anxiety. However, this anxiety plays a positive role because it causes him to realize that he still has the chance to make a choice and to lead his existence according to a new outlook. His anxiety is the anxiety of action; it does not allow him to be gripped or dwell on the meaninglessness of his past and to live more purposefully in his present. In this sense, one might say that Ivan moves beyond the condition of the Underground Man into a productive existential anxiety that is similar to Jude Fawley's anxiety upon abandoning religion.¹⁷ In their realization that the system they once belonged to is not necessarily what shapes true essence, both protagonists choose the isolation and abandonment needed to find the self over their former self-deception of devotion to common values and norms.

As a dying man who has never before stood aside to ask himself if he has been living life according to the Being-in-itself or the Being-for-itself, Ivan is angry that he is dying; however, he realizes moments before his death that the power of consciousness, the nihilation of Being-in-itself, "this intra-mundane nothingness cannot be produced by Being-in-itself" (Sartre, *Being* 23). By realizing his freedom to choose, he creates a new, responsible essence that will acknowledge

his previous mistakes and make amends for them. In his case, this essence derives from his realization that the world he was once caught up in consists of hypocrisy and formalities and that one cannot possibly achieve an authentic existence through such falsities. Ivan proves Sartre's notion that a human being only exists in action. Although Ivan's past is part of his being, it does not really define who he is at the moment, which is instead defined by the action he takes in that moment moving forward into the future, even if that future is death. Ivan realizes his freedom to act and shape a new essence, and eventually he peacefully accepts death.¹⁸

Tolstoy is justifiably famous as a practitioner of literary realism—Lukács, for example, argues that Tolstoy is historically important for “saving” the mode of realism after it had already gone decadent in Western Europe (*Studies* 129)—and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* certainly provides a compelling realistic narration of the suffering of Ivan as he moves toward his final end. On the other hand, the ironic narrative voice tends to destabilize any simple realistic reading, and it is also clear that Tolstoy's fame as a realist rests largely on his earlier “great” novels, including *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Yet *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, separated from these earlier novels by a period of many years in which Tolstoy wrote no fiction, differs from them in a number of important ways. In her introduction to the Carson translation of *Ivan Ilyich*, for example, Mary Beard notes that the text (along with *Confession*, also written during this later period) is written “more simply, even awkwardly” in comparison with the earlier novels (“Tolstoy” 15). However, even if the style of *Ivan Ilyich* may be simple, it is deceptively so. Despite the famous naturalism with which Ivan's dying agonies are described—Beard notes the preoccupation of many critics with trying to diagnose the exact nature of his fatal malady (18)—the fact is that *Ivan Ilyich*, in addition to being approachable as a literal story of the suffering of a dying man, lends itself to a number of other readings that move far beyond simple realism, to the

point that James Olney has called the story “a grotesque fairy tale” (107). The novella thus illustrates (among other things) that such motifs as allegory and fable can be perfectly at home in realist narratives, which are not, after all, bound by the real-world laws of physics, but are simply bound by the obligation to *appear* to operate according to the same rules and principles that obtain in the real world.

The most obvious allegorical reading of *Ivan Ilyich* would make its title character a sort of Everyman whose dying condition merely represents the universal human predicament. After all, we are all dying every day, growing closer to the end by the minute. The particularly vague and mysterious description of Ivan’s ailment supports this sort of reading, though this sort of reading is ultimately rather uninteresting and tells us little that we didn’t already know, even if it gives us a direct and visceral way to identify with and appreciate Ivan’s suffering. Of course, even this reading can make the story anything from a very realistic representation of one particular case of a universal experience to an abstraction in which Ivan’s illness is meant to be read in an entirely allegorical way, somewhat along the lines of Gregor Samsa’s symbolic transformation into an insect in Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis.”¹⁹

Read through Sartre, Ivan’s story is particularly rich in allegorical implications. For one thing, the pain that he suffers in the course of his illness might be taken as a sort of literalization of the anguish all individuals must move through in their quest for self-consciousness and the being-for-itself. Further, one could argue that, from a Sartrean perspective, the title of the novella refers not merely to the physical death that Ivan finally achieves (apparently) in the end of the story, but also to the spiritual and symbolic death that began with his years in law school and continued through his *comme il faut* career of going through the proper motions and attempting to obey all rules of bourgeois decorum in the pursuit of material gain. Indeed, one of the key

insights that Ivan achieves as he lies awaiting physical death, is the fact that he has been experiencing a sort of death in life throughout his adulthood, that he has never actually lived, except perhaps for a few brief moments of happiness in his childhood. He remembers his marriage with horror and his professional career with disgust: “And that deadly work of his and those worries about money, and on for a year, and two, and ten, and twenty—and always the same. And the further he went, the more deadly it became” (99).

Meanwhile, Ivan’s realization that his life has been a kind of death begins to occur in a crucial scene that is anything but realistic, as Ivan lies alone and suddenly hears a voice speaking to him, a voice that he interprets as the voice of his soul. The voice asks Ivan what he really wants, and he says that he wants to live as he had before his accident, “well and pleasantly.” But when the voice responds with skepticism, Ivan begins to review his memories and suddenly realizes that he has lived neither pleasantly nor well (98).

Ivan has never truly lived because he has remained trapped in Sartrean bad faith, doing what others have expected him to do rather than making his own choices for even the most important decisions in his life. Without, of course, access to Sartre’s vocabulary or philosophical system, Ivan (on this reading) breaks free of this bad faith when he realizes at last how meaningless his existence has been. The moment of equanimity and acceptance of his mortality that so many readers have seen as the conclusion of the story on this reading becomes a moment of transcendence: Ivan moves at last beyond the being-in-itself in a moment of transcendence that allows him at last to experience the being-for-itself just before his actual physical death (which is, Sartre would say, just a part of life). The utopian implication here, of course, would be that it is never too late to experience such a moment—for an individual or for a society. Indeed, if one goes all out with the utopian reading, one could even argue that Ivan does not physically

die at all, but simply says goodbye to his former life in what has conventionally been described as his moment of death. He does, after all, repeat to himself that “death is finished. ... It is no more” as the text comes to an end (110). And, while an immediately apparent reading here would be a Christian one that Ivan is moving onward to a new phase of his existence in the afterlife, a Sartrean reading might suggest that he is merely moving forward out of bad faith and into the being-for-itself.

Meanwhile, Sartre’s work offers other potential perspectives from which to read Ivan’s story allegorically as well. In his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre provides a penetrating analysis (well before Pierre Bourdieu) of the bourgeois man of “distinction” that might have been written almost directly as a description of Ivan Ilyich. For Sartre, the man of distinction is not born, but made. More importantly, he is made by others in the image of their expectations rather than by himself according to his own values, suppressing his own inclinations and his very nature in the pursuit of bourgeois success and the approval of society at large. For Sartre the man of distinction “maintains dictatorship over the body in the name of an absence of need; or in other words a dictatorship of culture over nature. His clothing is *constraint* ... he draws attention to his own *sobriety* ... his spouse does not conceal her *frigidity*” (Vol. I, 717). In short, the man of distinction exercises a violence against his own body in order to suppress its demands and to force it to conform to the needs of bourgeois propriety.

In addition to the fact that this description describes so well the way in which Ivan has lived his proper and decorous life, thinking of Ivan as an embodiment of the concept of the man of distinction also opens the way for an allegorical interpretation of his fatal illness as a revolt of the body, as a refusal of the body to continue to be suppressed by Ivan’s “distinguished” behavior. In this sense, the voice that Ivan hears, inspiring him to re-examine his life, might not

be the voice of his “soul,” as he imagines, but the voice of his own body, demanding that he take stock of what he has done to it in suppressing his own needs and desires in favor of the proper and convenient life.

In the end the body wins out, as it always does, and Ivan dies, at least at the literal level of the narrative. However, his recognition of the falsity of his previous life and his acceptance of the necessity of moving forward, even if into death, brings about victory of another sort, even if it is short-lived. But all such victories, all such instances of transcendence, are short-lived and must be constantly repeated until death finally comes. As Sartre’s own vision of living his life posthumously suggests, death is not tragic—unless it comes before transcendence has been achieved, before life has really been lived. By attaining transcendence and being-for-itself before he dies, Ivan avoids a tragic life.

The end of the text is as unromantic and unsentimental as the famed death scene of Emma Bovary (who dies *without* attaining transcendence), but it is not, in Sartrean terms, an unhappy ending.²⁰ We are simply told that “he breathed in, stopped halfway, stretched himself, and died” (110). This announcement, however, comes after Ivan achieves his transcendence. He feels no fear of death. Ivan dies, but death has been defeated. The most conventional of men has overcome convention, suggesting that there is hope for us all.

Notes

¹ Morson and Emerson argue that the hierarchy-upending world associated by Bakhtin with the carnival, especially in *Rabelais and His World*, is highly utopian, but they argue that this utopianism, however sincere, is greatly at odds with the rest of Bakhtin's work, which they view as primarily anti-utopian.

² The modern view of Dostoevsky as one of the first writers to have engaged with existentialism (but with an existentialism that is essentially at the opposite pole from the one occupied by Sartre) has been heavily influenced by Walter Kaufmann's classic introduction/anthology, tellingly entitled *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*.

³ See Michael Holquist for an argument that such a problematic sense of temporal continuity was typical of nineteenth-century Russian culture. Holquist relates this sense of temporal fragmentation to the Russian sense of being outside the narrative flow of Western history, leaving Russians in a confused and marginalized position with regard to their vision of the narrative of their own history.

⁴ That the Underground Man is, literally, a character from fiction is one of the many ironies of this intensely ironic text, and one of the aspects of the text that identifies it as a surprisingly modern one, given Dostoevsky's own reactionary bias.

⁵ In this sense, it is highly relevant that Bakhtin sees the Underground Man (and other Dostoevsky characters of a similar type) as a direct descendent of Gogol's clerk who has moved one step forward in the evolution of the representation of self-consciousness as a character trait. Whereas the Gogolian clerk is purely static, the Underground Man, for Bakhtin, is "occupied primarily with the task of becoming conscious, the sort of hero whose life would be concentrated on the pure function of gaining consciousness of himself and the world" (*Problems* 50).

⁶ Though the original 1851 version of London's Crystal Palace was in fact a temporary structure, it was rebuilt in a "permanent" form in 1854. Ironically, this permanent structure was itself destroyed by fire in 1936.

⁷ For a general discussion of the religious aspects of *Notes from Underground*, see J. A. Jackson. For a discussion of Dostoevsky's animosity toward secular humanism, see Alexander-Davey.

⁸ For a discussion of Dostoevsky's (mostly hostile) dialogue with science, see Diane Oenning Thompson.

⁹ That Zamyatin is himself opposed to excessively rigid scientific/mathematical thinking can be seen in the fact that the dehumanizing conditions in his One State are symbolized in the fact that citizens of the dystopian regime are represented not by names, but by numbers, and by the fact that the State is devoted to a particularly rigid form of "scientific" thinking.

¹⁰ See also Hudspeth for a discussion of the comic aspects of *Notes from Underground* from a slightly different perspective.

¹¹ If nothing else, it is clear that *Notes from Underground*, with its fragmented, truncated narrative and unlikeable, unreliable narrator, breaks almost all of the rules of realist fiction. In this sense, the text might be seen as Dostoevsky's attempt to resist the pull of realist fiction, an attempt that paradoxically conforms to the fundamental tendencies of realist fiction and of bourgeois ideology, with their drive for innovation and their almost total lack of respect for tradition. Dostoevsky's text represents an anti-authoritarian challenge to its own genre, but that genre already endorses such challenges in advance.

¹² In addition to the skepticism of Morson and Emerson concerning Bakhtin's utopian vision of the carnival, numerous critics have pointed out the problematic nature of Bakhtin's vision of the carnival as a symbol of subversion of authority. Terry Eagleton, for example, is quite skeptical of the subversive potential of Bakhtin's notion of the carnival, pointing out that the actual medieval carnival from which Bakhtin takes his imagery was "a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art" (*Walter Benjamin* 148, Eagleton's emphasis). It is also the case, as Booker points out, that Bakhtin's celebration of the carnival "as an unequivocal image of emancipation seems to ignore the important fact that carnivalesque violence was often directed not at official authority but precisely at the kinds of oppressed and marginal groups who would presumably be liberated by carnivalesque subversion of authority" (*Techniques* 6).

¹³ The text lampoons this hierarchy in a number of ways, including its description of the career of Ivan's father as having finally brought him, through a series of promotions, to a position in which he is incapable of performing any meaningful work, but must be kept on because of his years of seniority. Apparently the Peter Principle, ostensibly identified by Laurence J. Peter in 1968, was already in operation in nineteenth-century Russia.

¹⁴ Ivan's wife even persists in calling her husband "Jean," the French equivalent to the name "Ivan," thus displaying both her distance from him and her faux sophistication.

¹⁵ Jarrell points out the extent to which the "essential elements" of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* are, in fact, derived from Tolstoy's autobiographical text *Confession* (xxii).

¹⁶ This particular Sartrean reading is, of course, not all that different from the classic reading of the text as showing how Ivan comes to accept death before he dies, thus endowing his life with meaning. See F.M. Kamm for a classic exposition of this reading.

¹⁷ Ivan also moves beyond conventional religion as part of his process of enlightenment. At one point he is visited by a priest, who takes Ivan's confession and momentarily gives him hope. However, Ivan quickly realizes the falsity of the priest's clichéd pronouncements, which are just another example of the facticity Ivan is beginning to escape.

¹⁸ See Hofmeyr for a reading of *Ivan Ilyich* within the context of the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, for whom the encounter with death is an exemplary version of the encounter with the Other. On this reading, by coming to peace with death before he dies, Ivan not only finds meaning in his life, but also establishes a connection with the Other of a kind he had failed to achieve in his previous relations with other human beings.

¹⁹ Interestingly, Robert Wexelblatt has outlined a number of parallels between *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and “The Metamorphosis.” Unfortunately, Wexelblatt uses these parallels to make the banal (and undemonstrable) argument that Kafka might have been influenced by Tolstoy, rather than the more interesting argument that Tolstoy might have been writing in a mode that anticipated the later writing of Kafka.

²⁰ Other readings are, of course, possible. See Gerald Lang for a particularly cynical reading of *Ivan Ilyich* which argues that Ivan really learns nothing before his death, his “transcendence” merely being the culmination of a series of mistakes and misrecognitions on his part.

Conclusion

In this volume, I have examined a number of works of nineteenth-century realist fiction from England and Russia, using the double interpretive method recommended by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*. In particular, I have employed the dialectical double hermeneutic suggested by Jameson, who argues that the most productive approach to literary texts is to consider them from the double perspective of ideology and utopia. That is, critics should approach literary texts by seeking out the ideological roots (or the “political unconscious”) that lie beneath the textual surface and from which the texts grow, while at the same time keeping a careful eye out for the (often well hidden) utopian longings and visions that also inform all works of literature. Of course, Jameson (like most Marxist critics) primarily means “bourgeois ideology” (or “capitalist ideology”) when he says “ideology,” just as he mostly means ideas that point the way beyond capitalism and toward socialism when he says “utopia.”

Jameson is also typical of Marxist critics in that he tends to regard ideology as a conservative or limiting factor that establishes strict conditions of possibility for what can be accomplished by the author of a literary text, whether or not the author is aware of those conditions. The utopian energies of the text can then be regarded as a manifestation of the longings of the author to break free of the limitations of ideology, which themselves can be read as an instance of the broader historical longings of individual or collective subjects for a world in which they are free of the restrictions placed upon them by the structures of power in the worlds in which they actually live. The double hermeneutic of ideology and utopia is thus necessary to understand the full implications of any literary text or any literary phenomenon, such as a genre.

Jameson's understanding of "utopia," however, is a complex and sophisticated one that goes well beyond the simple attempt to imagine what an ideal world would be like. Indeed, Jameson, building upon the work of Ernst Bloch, regards any attempt to imagine such a world as doomed to failure—and as interesting only to the extent that we can learn something from that failure. Instead, Jameson (like Bloch) regards "utopia" as a process, rather than a product, as an attempt to struggle imaginatively beyond the limitations placed on one's thought by ideology, one's reach always exceeding one's grasp in the ongoing and never-ending project of thinking the unthinkable.

I choose the word "project" here carefully, because this sort of ongoing project and indeed the word "project" itself are key elements of the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre (himself the subject of Jameson's own doctoral dissertation), whose work I have used as an important supplement to that of Jameson, especially in my own project of teasing out the utopian inclinations of the texts I have read. Jameson's "ideology" can thus be seen as analogous to the "facticity" that Sartre sees as placing predetermined limitations on individual freedom, while the striving for the "not-yet" that informs the Bloch-Jameson vision of utopia is analogous to Sartre's ongoing process of seeking to transcend that facticity and to move toward the authentic mode of existence that he refers to as the "Being-for-itself." Sartre thus joins Jameson as a key theoretical resource in my readings of specific works of English and Russian fiction from the nineteenth century, readings that also seek to uncover broader trends in nineteenth-century realist fiction as a whole, especially with regard to the double movement of ideology and utopia. My decision to read English and Russian fiction side-by-side was, in fact, made precisely with this kind of breadth in mind, given that English society and Russian society occupy the opposite poles of European history in the nineteenth century, England being on the forefront of

capitalist modernity and Russia lagging behind the rest of the continent, still fighting a rearguard action against modernization.

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I examine Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), both of which participate in a group of "social-problem" novels that appeared in England in the middle of the nineteenth century with the avowed purpose of contributing to solutions for the very real social and economic problems that had been brought about in England by the industrial revolution. The utopian inclinations of these texts are clear in that both seek to imagine a kinder and gentler version of capitalism in which workers can receive better treatment from bosses and bosses can in return receive more productive labor and larger profits from their workers. In short, both *Mary Barton* and *Hard Times* are thoroughly informed by bourgeois ideology, a fact that places severe restrictions on the kinds of utopian energies that the texts can generate, given that both Gaskell and Dickens seem incapable of thinking beyond capitalism or imagining any system that is not fundamentally capitalist in its mode of production.

This situation is not surprising given how firmly established capitalism was as the economic base of England or how dominant bourgeois ideology was in the English superstructure of the time. Russia was a different matter, however. With one foot still firmly planted in the Middle Ages, nineteenth-century Russian society was just dipping the toes of the other foot into the waters of capitalist modernity. Thus, while bourgeois ideology had become a well established, conservative force in England by mid-century, bourgeois thought was still progressive, even radical, in Russia, as it had been in England a couple of centuries before. Bourgeois ideology was a growing force in Russia, though, as witnessed by the rise of realist fiction as a key element of nineteenth-century Russian culture. In Chapter Three I draw upon this

complex historical situation to examine Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" (1842)—sometimes considered the founding text of Russian realism—and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866), a key example of the nineteenth-century Russian realist novel in its mature form.

In these texts, Gogol and Dostoevsky undertake conservative projects that are designed to battle against the incursions of capitalist modernity and to promote nostalgic visions of an idealized, religion-driven, traditional Russia. I find, however, a strong presence of bourgeois ideology in both texts, partly as a result of the realist mode in which they are written, which tends to carry markers of the bourgeois view of the world. This ideological presence tends to undermine these nostalgic projects and to suggest the growing power of bourgeois ideas in Russia. In short, as opposed to the usual Western situation, in which ideology is generally seen as conservative and utopia as progressive, the reverse is the case here. The utopian visions of Gogol and Dostoevsky are conservative, but bourgeois ideology (now an oppositional, rather than a dominant ideology) exerts a progressive force in their texts. The readings in this chapter, then, reinforce Jameson's fundamental emphasis on the importance of historicizing one's readings of literary texts, demonstrating that the meaning of even fundamental concepts such as ideology and utopia can be very different in different historical circumstances.

Chapter Four is devoted to readings of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), both of which are informed by bourgeois ideology in a later, more decadent, and more conservative phase than are the texts of Dickens and Gaskell that I examine in Chapter Two. On the surface, these texts seem pessimistic, reflecting a period in which the once forward-looking bourgeoisie (inventors, after all, of the very notion of history as progress) have become timid and staid, opposing all fundamental change. These texts would

seem to epitomize the notion of ideology as conservative. However, my readings, derived both from the historically-based utopian theories of Bloch and Jameson and from the existentialist philosophy of Sartre, demonstrate that these texts still contain strong (and strongly progressive) utopian energies which suggest that individuals still have significant opportunities to live authentic lives, and in ways that indicate the possibility of genuine historical change as well.

Similarly, my findings in Chapter Five suggest utopian possibilities in Dostoevsky's short novel *Notes from Underground* (1864) and of Leo Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886). Both of these texts, like the Russian texts I discuss in Chapter Three, strongly reject bourgeois ideology. However, Dostoevsky's text does so in a particularly complex and dialogical way, its notoriously nasty narrator himself being strongly influenced by the very ideas that he so bitterly dismisses. These ideas, however, bring positive utopian energies to the text, whether the misanthropic narrator likes it or not. Meanwhile, Tolstoy's text, written more than twenty years later, adds a new dimension by demonstrating the way in which, while still not dominant in Russia in the 1880s, bourgeois ideology there had already begun to take on conservative aspects, perhaps under the influence of the growing conservatism of bourgeois ideology in Western Europe.

Together these readings demonstrate the flexibility of Jameson's double hermeneutic of ideology and utopia by showing that it can be applied to texts in which the fundamental forces of ideology and utopia operate in a variety of different ways, largely due to differences in the historical contexts of the texts being read. Indeed, this double hermeneutic is, by definition, applicable to *all* literary texts and to all products of human culture, though it must clearly be applied in different ways to different texts, especially if they arise from different historical circumstances. As a result, the same interpretive schemes I have employed in this dissertation

could easily be applied to any number of other works as well, *ad infinitum*. One might, for example, want to tackle the works of the great French nineteenth-century realist authors (Balzac, Flaubert, Stendhal) to seek a third exemplum situated somewhere between the historical situations of England and Russia. And, of course, there are still mighty works of English and Russian fiction (*Middlemarch*, *War and Peace*, *The Brothers Karamazov*) that might also be usefully illuminated with this approach. Still, the texts I have chosen well demonstrate the effectiveness of the approach, covering enough ground to produce important basic insights into the workings of ideology and utopia in nineteenth-century realist fiction. For now, therefore, as the frame narrator of *Notes from Underground* suggests at the end of that text, this may be a good place to stop.

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